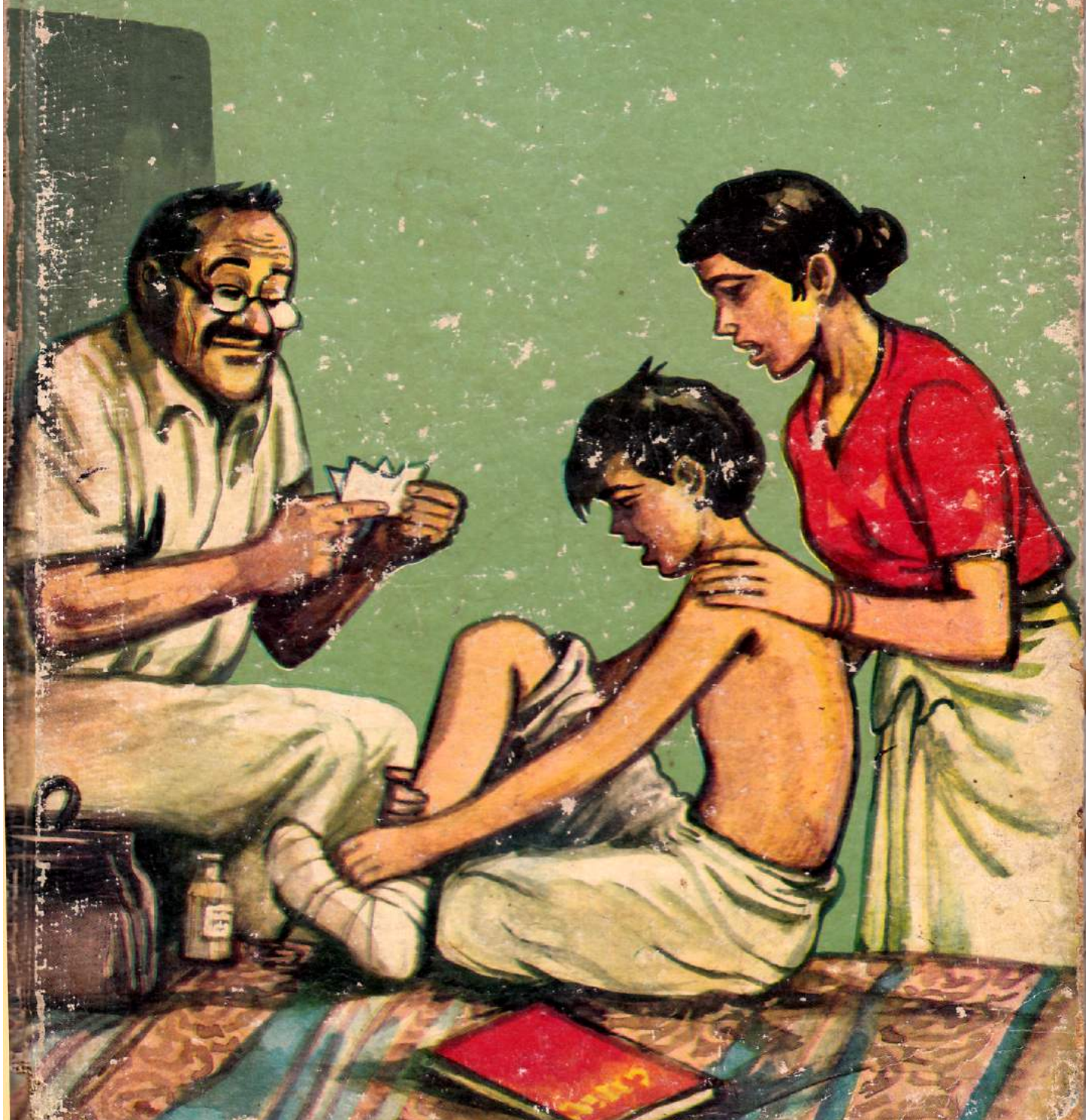


DOCTOR'S TALES



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DOCTOR'S TALES

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Foreword

During 25 years of independence our country has made considerable progress in various fields. There has been economic development, educational facilities have grown, standards of health have improved and we continue to march forward. There are, however, certain areas where our people still adhere to ways of life that are not conducive to their welfare. Many of us, both in villages and towns, do not pay proper attention to preventive measures against disease and to the creation of healthy conditions in and around our residential areas. Some of these shortcomings have been pointed out in this book in the form of short stories and if they bring home to our readers the lesson of neglect in the sphere of health and sanitation the book will have served a good purpose.

Germes in the Well

Veeranpatti is a village in the Madurai District of Tamil Nadu. Palani, the famous pilgrim centre in South India, is only about seven miles from there. In 1949, Veeranpatti had about two hundred houses. A road running through the village led to Palani. The closely built houses were on either side of this road. They were mostly one-roomed huts. At one end of Veeranpatti was the village well which supplied water to the entire population. The school was a long thatched building with walls merely four feet high. Bamboo screens partitioned it into four class-rooms.

The school staff consisted of a headmaster and two other teachers, of whom one was a lady. The headmaster was nearly fifty years old. He was very particular about discipline but he rarely used the cane. He was the most learned man in the village and was well-known for his honesty. The people of the village had great respect for him. They always took their disputes and problems to him and accepted his advice.

The headmaster wanted his pupils to be disciplined, punctual and clean. He believed in setting an example and was always clean and simple in his dress. The students gladly followed him.

The first school bell used to ring at 8.45 in the morning and the second at nine. The headmaster would always be in the school by five minutes to nine and the lessons started sharply at nine. He took the fifth class which was the seniormost in the school. He took great pains to teach his pupils. The headmaster was sincerely interested in their welfare. For the benefit of those students who were not well up in certain subjects, he held extra classes at his home. He did not charge anything for these extra classes. The other teachers also had to follow his example. He never made his students help his wife in her domestic work. Whatever was grown in the school garden was distributed among the students who had toiled for it. The headmaster could never even dream of taking any portion for himself.

One day when the headmaster was in his class teaching arithmetic, there came, from the other end of the village, a loud noise of several people shouting together. The voices came nearer. But the headmaster continued writing on the blackboard. The students also sat with their eyes glued to the board. The shouting was now very close and they could catch some words like "Catch them! Catch them!" and "Break their necks!"

Before the students could know what it was all about, two men dashed into the classroom and fell at the head-



master's feet. "Save us, sir, save us!" they cried.

The crowd following the two men stopped outside. The headmaster asked the students to sit quietly and went out to the agitated crowd. "What is the matter? Why are you chasing these two men?" he asked them.

Many excited men tried to answer simultaneously.

"Now, now, one of you come forward and answer me," said the headmaster.

An elderly man stepped forward and said, "Head-

master Sahib, we caught these men sprinkling poison into our wells."

"They wanted to poison and kill the whole lot of us. They wanted to rob our village," someone from the crowd cried in excitement.

"We will bury them alive!" shouted others.

"Keep quiet! Please keep quiet. Let me see," said the headmaster. Then turning to the two young strangers he asked, "Yes? What is this all about?"

"Sir," said one of them, visibly shaking with fear, "we are from the Health Department. We have come from Palani. Cholera has broken out there. One man has died of it in the nearby village. The Health Officer has sent us to disinfect the wells in the surrounding villages. We were putting potassium permanganate into a well and these people set upon us. Heavens, we would have been beaten to death had we not run away."

Some more men had joined the crowd. They shouted, "The water of the well has turned black. What more evidence do you want? Surely, they wanted to kill us all."

At this stage the headmaster told his students to go home. He asked the assembled people to come in and sit down.

"But sir, they would kill us!" said one of the men from the Health Department.

"No one will touch you so long as I am here," assured the headmaster.

When the people sat down the headmaster sent for a tumbler of water.

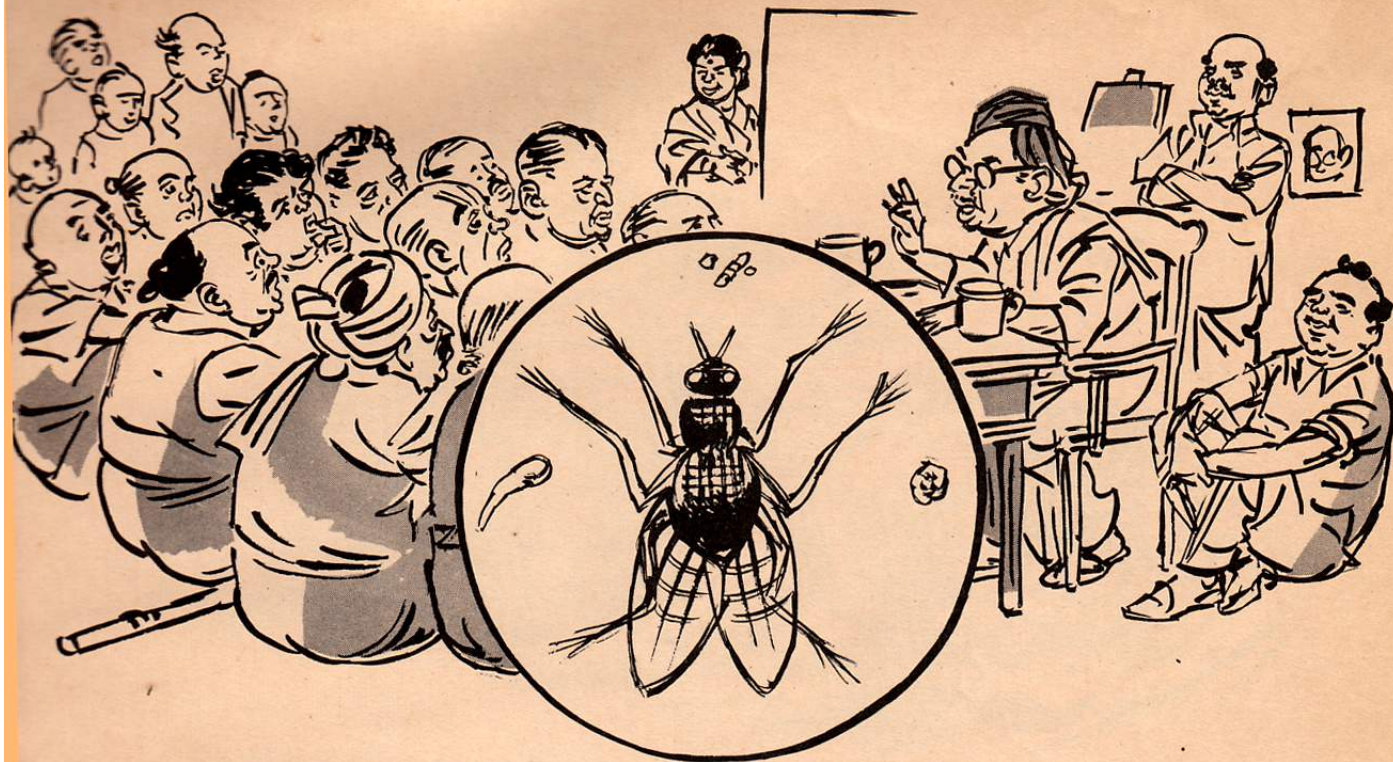
“Look,” addressing the villagers he said, “these men were not adding any poison to our water. It is a medicine to destroy the infection in the water. It kills the germs of disease. I will now add a crystal of it to this tumbler and drink the water myself. It will show you that it is not poison.”

The villagers watched him in complete silence as the headmaster took a crystal of potassium permanganate and mixed it with the water. The water turned light violet.

The headmaster raised the tumbler and at once some villagers burst into nervous shouts, “Don’t drink it! Don’t drink it! It is nothing but poison!”

“I tell you, it is nothing of that kind,” replied the headmaster and drank up the water.



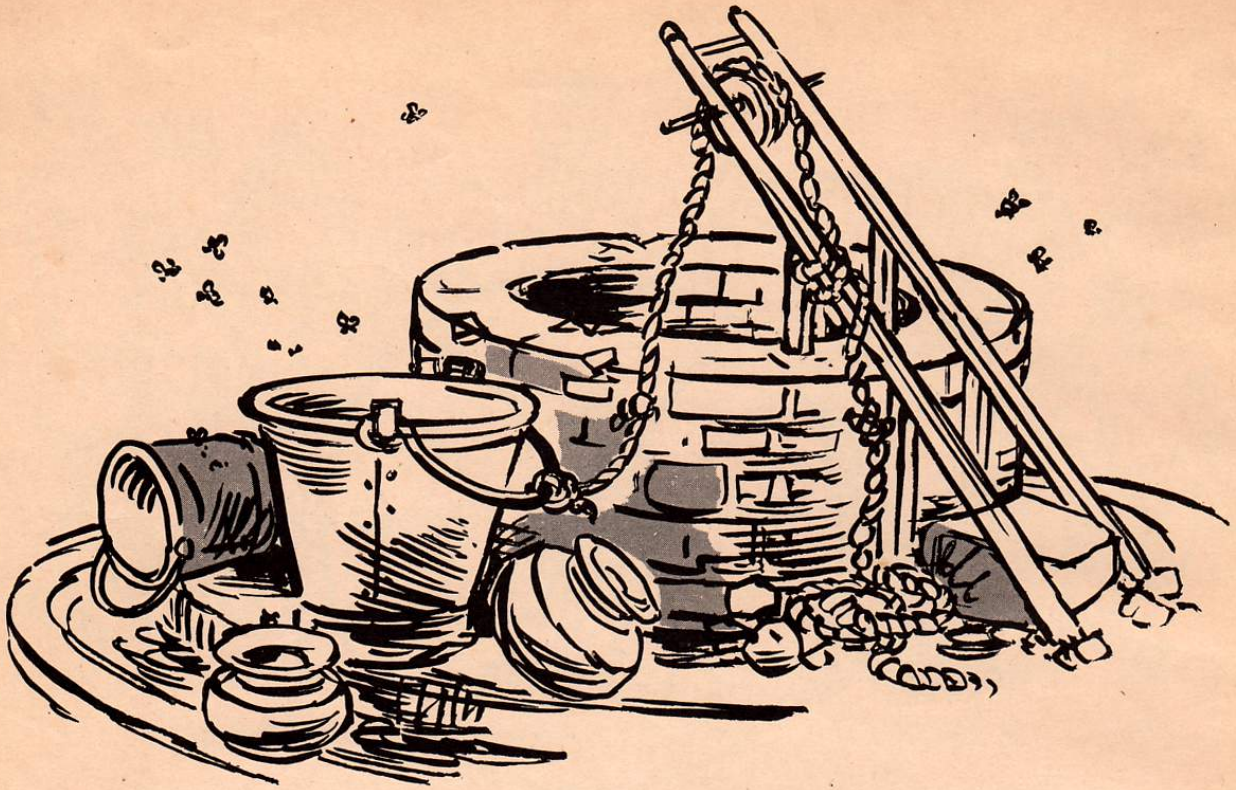


The village crowd closely watched the headmaster's face. They were expecting some unfortunate development.

"Cholera has broken out in Palani town," continued the headmaster, "and one man died of it in the nearby village. So, the Government Health Officer at Palani has sent these people to disinfect the water in the wells. They are here to help us, and not to poison anybody."

"And what has the water to do with cholera?" asked an elderly man.

"Cholera is caused by a germ," replied the headmaster. "As you know, a man suffering from cholera vomits and purges. His vomit and excreta have countless cholera germs. As you should have noticed, flies settle on the filth and then on human food. That food becomes full of cholera germs. Any person taking the food is liable to get cholera."



“But what has it got to do with water?” persisted the elder.

“You know, the well is the only source of water to us. If it gets the germs of cholera, there is quite a likelihood of our getting the disease. That is how cholera spreads rapidly in the villages. Every one of us lets his bucket into the well and afterwards it is left in the open yard. If a fly sits on the excreta of a cholera patient and then sits on the buckets and the buckets are lowered into the well, surely, the water in the well would get cholera germs. So now onwards, we must not allow anybody to use his own bucket for drawing out water. We must keep a good bucket free from flies. Only this bucket should be lowered into the well. Instead of everyone drawing water oneself, only one man should draw for all. We should take turns at the well. In this way we would be doing our best to avoid the germs.”

“Headmaster Sahib, what other precautions should we take?” asked the man.

“We should see that no one eases himself in the fields or on the road. We must dig some trench or pit latrines. All of us must use these latrines only. Anyway, I have been thinking for sometime that people should have latrines and use them. Now let us make use of this occasion to introduce sanitary measures in our village. It will make our village cleaner and healthier.”

“I wonder if these people would use latrines,” said one of the teachers. “For generations they are accustomed to go out in the open fields.”

“Nothing is impossible,” replied the headmaster. “We must try. I am sure, they will change their habits gradually.”

“We shall do whatever you say,” said one of them, “but what about the children? They would continue to use the open spaces.”

“No, it is very important that no one does anything like that — specially when we are threatened by cholera. Even if one man gets cholera and then uses the fields, then, as I explained to you, the flies will carry the infection to human food and in this way cholera will spread. When people live together in a community, as in our village, everyone should think of the community as a whole. All of us should do everything possible to make our village safe and healthy. What I mean is that the children should not be allowed to use the roadsides as lavatories and the parents must see to it that they don’t do so,” said the headmaster.

“Any other precautions?” he asked the Health Department men.

“Oh, you explained everything nicely. I would just add that people should not keep their food exposed to flies. They should not buy any such food either. They should drink only boiled water. And, God forbid, if anyone shows any signs of cholera infection, it should be reported to us immediately. Then alone proper treatment can be given to save him. And then alone we can take precautions to check the spread of cholera.”

“How serious is the epidemic?” asked the headmaster.

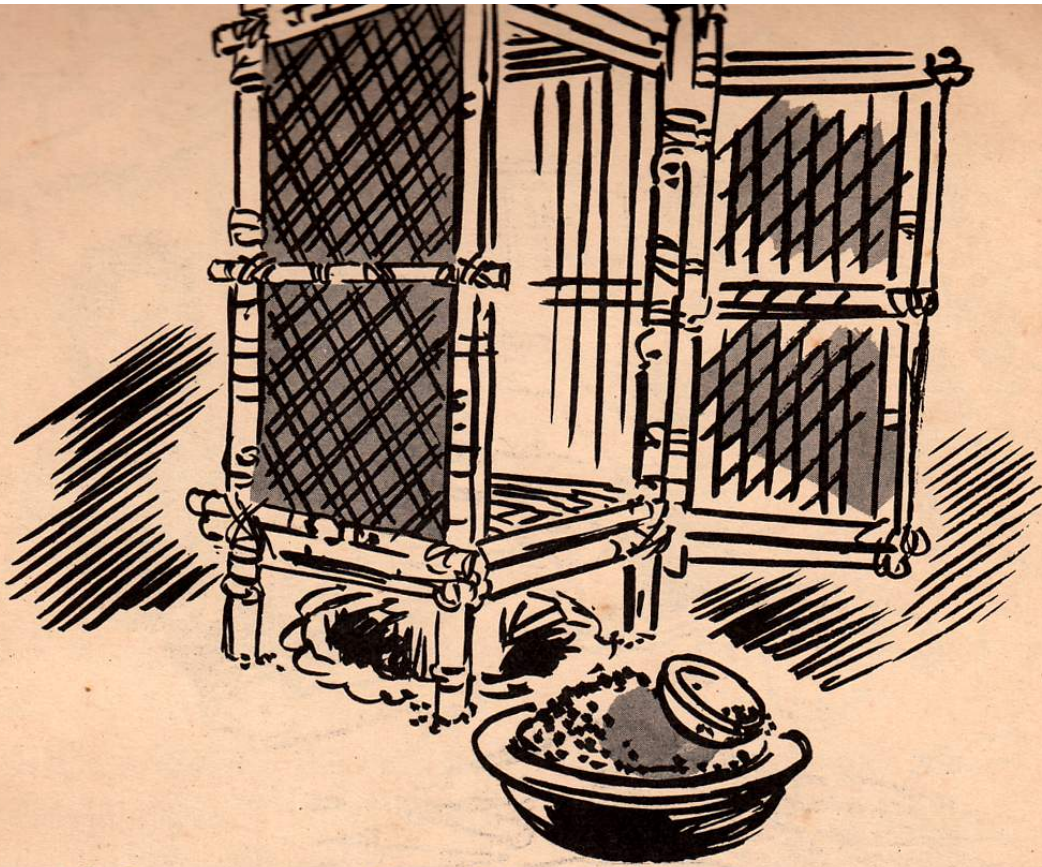
“Many people have died in Palani town. And there is the report of one death in a neighbouring village.”

“Whatever you might do,” said the elderly man in a sad voice, “if cholera comes to our village, there will be, surely, many deaths. It would be better to go away from the village and return when it is safe.”

“Hear me,” replied the headmaster firmly, “carry out the instructions faithfully and no harm will come to anyone.”

“Sir,” requested one of the Health Department men, “please tell these men that doctors will be visiting the village to give them the anti-cholera inoculation. I hope, there won’t be any fresh misunderstanding.”

The headmaster nodded and said aloud, “There is an injection which prevents cholera. Soon doctors from Palani will be visiting our village. They will give us this injection. I hope, no one will run away. If anyone avoids the injection, he would not only put himself in danger but

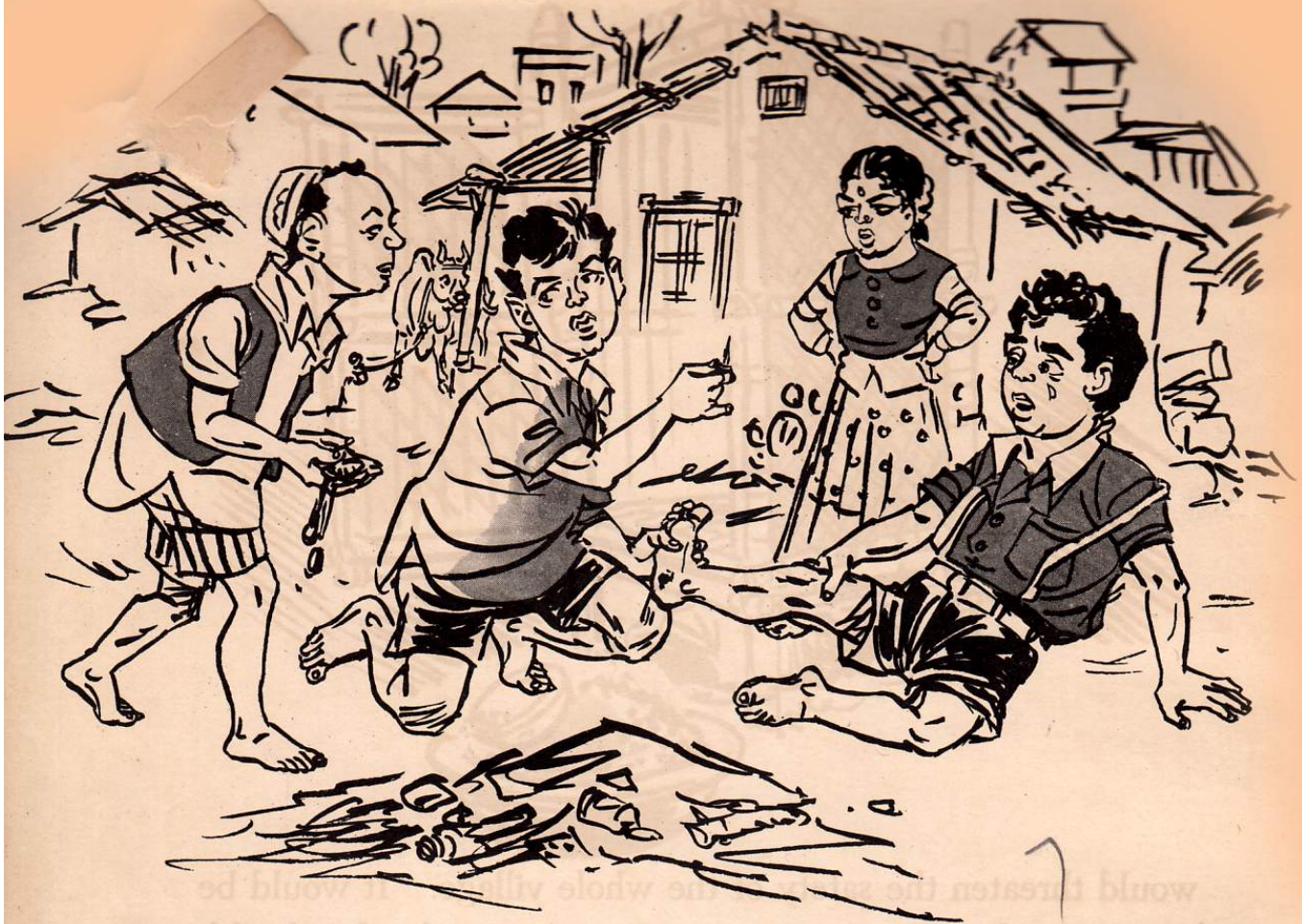


would threaten the safety of the whole village. It would be an unsocial act. We must cooperate with the health authorities."

Then, addressing the Health Department men, he said, "Please let me know in advance about the doctors' visit. I will get all the men, women and children assembled in the school. Everyone could be inoculated there."

"Thank you very much, sir," said one of them. "We will now go to the other village. It was you who saved us, otherwise we would never have been able to leave this village. If only we had more men like you in our villages, our task would be easier."

"Maybe the villagers are ignorant," the headmaster smiled, "but they cooperate when things are explained to them."



Nail in the Foot

It was late in the evening. Three boys were playfully chasing one another in the Royapuram street of Madras City. Mostly middle-class people lived in that locality but there were some rich families too. Unfortunately, everybody threw refuse from their houses right into the street. The street was, therefore, always dirty.

One of the boys was an Anglo-Indian, John by name. His father was an Assistant Station Master in the Southern Railway. The second boy, Gopal, was the son of a clerk working in the General Hospital. The third was Kasim. His

father owned a small shop at the street corner. The three were great friends. John was about twelve and Gopal was one year older. Kasim was about the same age as John. Every evening after returning from their schools, they played their favourite game of marbles in the street. That day, however, John returned late. There was not enough time left for their pet game. So, they were running about and chasing one another in the street.

Suddenly John uttered a cry and sat down in the street. "Something has got into my foot," he said.

Gopal examined his foot and said, "Oh, it is a small nail. Shall I pull it out?" And taking it out he showed it to John. It was a small rusty nail.

"Now, just apply some cow-dung to the wound and it will heal up," Gopal suggested.

Kasim ran down the street and found some cow-dung. He brought a small ball of it and applied it to John's wound. Then, Gopal and Kasim resumed their play. John sat watching them. After a while when the street lights were on, they went back to their homes.

The next evening when they returned from their schools, they played as usual. John complained of slight pain in his foot. But it was all forgotten in the excitement of the game. But the next day John's foot was more painful and he limped home from school. He did not feel like playing. So they sat in the verandah of John's house and played snakes and ladders.

In the morning John found that his whole leg was pain-

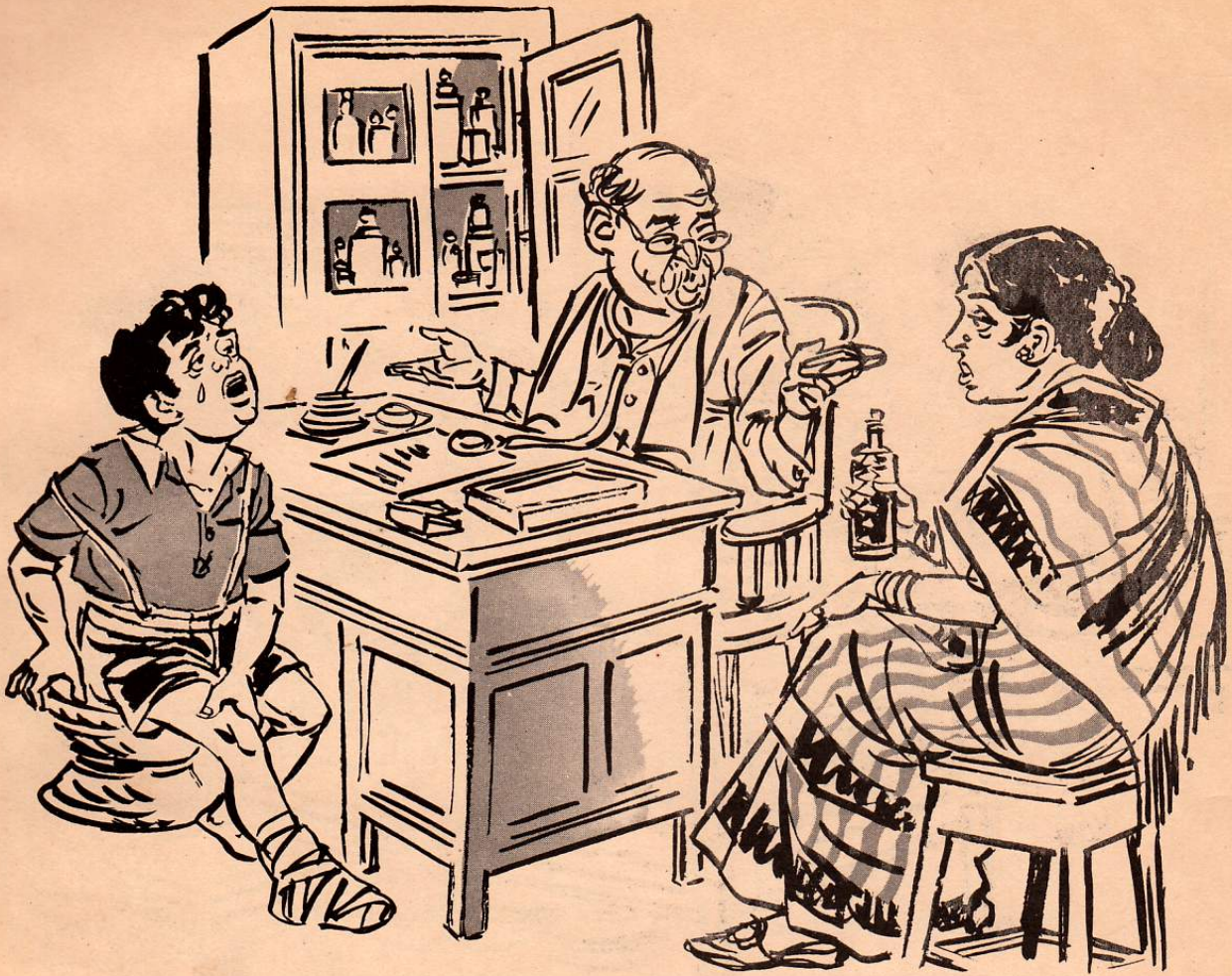
ing so acutely that he could not walk. He could not go to the school either. In the evening his mother took him to a retired compounder who was now practising as a doctor in the next street. This 'doctor' examined him. He gave him some pills to swallow. He also told his mother to wash John's foot with hot-water.

When his friends returned from school, they found John in bed. Gopal and Kasim sat with him for some time and then went out to play by themselves.

Two days passed. The treatment did not reduce John's pain. He could not sleep at night. Early in the morning his father took John to the same 'doctor'. He examined him and said that pus had formed in the wound in his foot. His father held him while the doctor punctured his skin and let out the pus. John screamed in pain but the 'doctor' comforted him by assuring him that there would be no more pain afterwards. He returned home with his father. When his friends visited him in the evening, they found him in high spirits. John even hoped that he would join the play next evening.

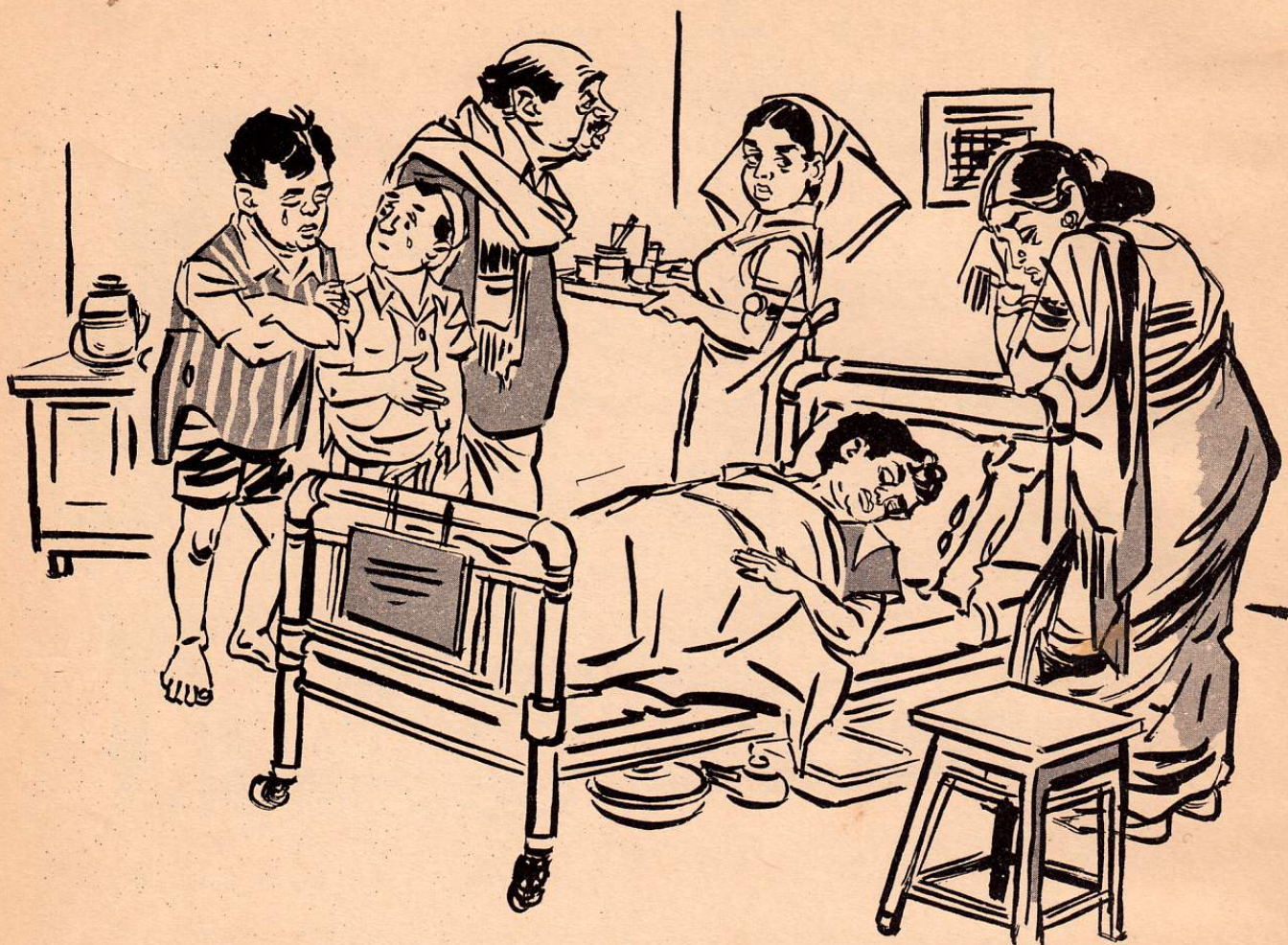
Three more days were over but John did not get any better. In fact, he was worse. Daily his father carried him to the quack and he did nothing more than squeeze out the pus and dress the wound. It was an ordeal for poor John, but he bore it courageously. Every evening his friends visited him and then went out to play.

It was after a week that, when John woke up in the morning, he complained of severe pain in the back of his



neck. He found it difficult to swallow coffee. His father told the 'doctor' about it. But the 'doctor' only thought that John was going to get fever and he gave some more pills. The pills did not work. The pain in the neck increased. Not only did John have difficulty in swallowing his food, but found it hard to open his mouth. When his friends were with him in the evening, he just couldn't talk.

Gopal told his father about John's condition. His father went to see him. He thought that John was in a serious condition. He advised his mother that he should be



admitted to the General Hospital at once. When John's father returned from his work late in the night, they took a taxi and went to the hospital. Gopal's father went with them and helped John get admission immediately.

When Gopal's father came back it was past midnight and Gopal was fast asleep. But when he woke up in the morning, the first thing he did was to ask his father

about John.

"I am afraid, I have bad news for you," said his father. "John is suffering from tetanus. It is commonly known as the lock-jaw. I know the house surgeon attending on him. He says that it is a serious disease and, well, recovery is rare."

"How did he get it, Father?" asked Gopal.

"The doctor told me that the disease is caused by a germ which is present in the soil, especially in dirty soil. The germs get into the body through wounds. Now, you told me that John got a nail in his foot while he was playing. Our street is full of dirt and filth; everybody throws dirt and refuse there from his house. The nail must have been dirty; it must have had the germs of the disease. They, perhaps, got into his body through the wound, and John got the disease."

"Father, I want to see John in the hospital," said Gopal.

"I will take you there this evening," his father assured him.

Gopal immediately ran to Kasim and told him about John.

"Shall I come with you to the hospital?" Kasim eagerly asked.

"Yes, by all means," replied Gopal.

In the evening Gopal's father took them to the hospital. Gopal's mother also went with them.

Gopal and Kasim were taken aback at the sight of John. Only the day before they had seen him. Now he was so changed. He looked as if he had been ill for months. He was lying on the bed moaning. On seeing his friends, John shed tears and Gopal and Kasim could hardly restrain theirs.

John had a tube let into his mouth through which he was being fed. John's mother saw them and wept. Gopal's mother tried to comfort her. Suddenly, John cried out loudly. His whole body began to shake violently. His muscles were contracting. His father dashed to inform the nurse. She fetched the doctor. The doctor gave an injection to John. After a few moments of great suffering the shaking of his body stopped. John was left exhausted and frightened.

"Oh, Mammy, Mammy, am I to die? Don't let me die, Mammy," wept John.

His mother wanted to hug him and comfort him, but his father, with tearful eyes, held her back. Whenever she hugged him it brought another trembling of his body.

Gopal and Kasim left the hospital with sorrowful hearts.

"Father," asked Gopal, "will John be all right?"

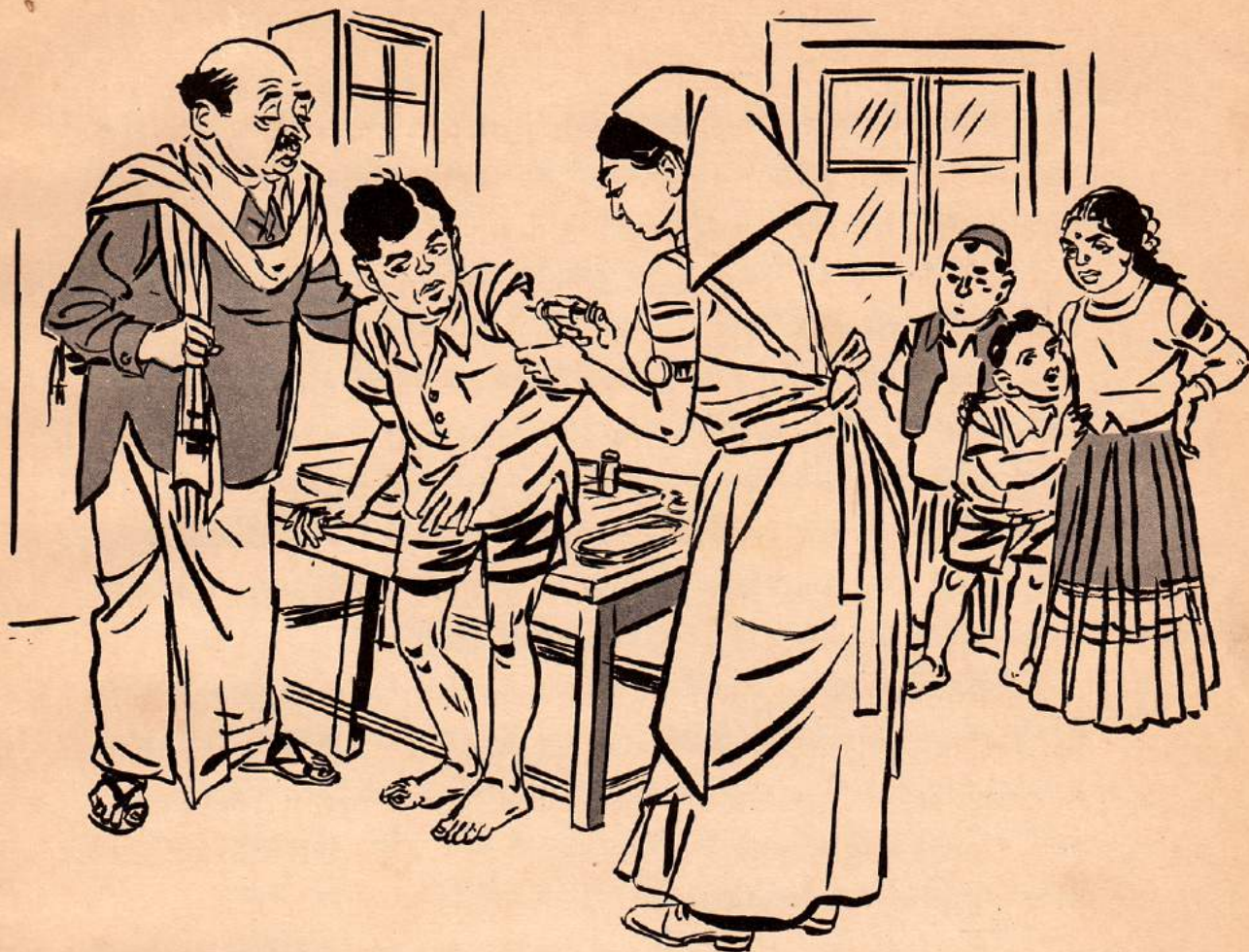
"Let us pray to God. He will help save him," replied his father.

Next evening Gopal and Kasim returned from school early. They waited for Gopal's father. It was 6 p.m. but he was nowhere to be seen. Then, Gopal ran to his mother.

"Mother, Father has not come yet. Shall we go to the hospital with Kasim's elder brother?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "you should not go without your father. In any case, the gatekeeper will not let you in."

Just then they saw a taxi coming to a stop in front of John's house. They rushed to find out who had come. Then came another taxi. Gopal's father got down from the first



one. Then the door of the second taxi was opened and they saw the dead body of their friend being taken out. Poor John was dead. Gopal and Kasim burst into tears. They had lost their playmate for good.

The body was taken into the house by two friends of John's father.

Two days later, Gopal's father took him and his younger brother and sister to the General Hospital. There a nurse gave an injection to each one of them in their arms. On the way back their father told them that they would have to take

two more injections at one-month intervals. The injection would protect them from tetanus, the disease of which John had died.

“Why were we not given these injections before, Father?” asked Gopal

“Because I did not know about such injections,” replied his father. “When John was in the hospital I discussed the disease with the doctor. He told me that once it develops in the body there is little chance of recovery. He also told me about this injection which is known as Triple Antigen. Generally, the course is given to a baby when he is three months old. After the first course, an injection is given once in three years till the child reaches fifteen. This course gives life-long protection against tetanus and also against diphtheria and whooping cough. These two are also dangerous diseases and affect children.”

“Father, had John been taken to the hospital earlier, would he have survived?” asked Gopal.

“The doctor told me,” replied Gopal’s father, “that if he had been rushed to the hospital soon after he got the injury, they would have given him an injection known as A. T. Serum. It would have prevented the disease from developing. Had he been taken even when he complained of pain, he could have quite recovered. Unfortunately, the doctor who treated him first was not qualified. He could not recognize the disease.”

“John had many injuries before,” said Gopal, “and I too have had. We always applied cow-dung to the wound and

it healed all right. How is it that John did not get the disease before ? ”

“The disease can only develop when there are germs around and they get into the body through a wound. That is why all injuries should be properly treated, particularly when there is dirt around. We never know if tetanus germs are present.” Then Gopal’s father added, “So, whenever you get an injury, it must be well cleaned. All dirt must be removed and proper medicines applied. For extra precaution, one protective injection should be taken.”

“Father, I will also tell Kasim about these injections,” said Gopal.

“Of course. And if he wants my help, I shall take him to the hospital along with his brothers and sisters and I will see that they get the Triple Antigen injections. You better also tell your other friends about it. All the children must be protected against tetanus. The tragic death of poor John should be a lesson to all of us.”

The Groom was Late

Neyoor is a small town in Tamil Nadu. It is about twenty miles from Cape Comorin. A man called Edward lived in this town. He had retired from service.

One Christmas Edward's house was full of activity. That day his daughter, Jane, was going to be married to George. George's home town was Colachel, only four miles away from Neyoor. But he worked in a tea estate in the hills of Travancore.

A pandal was put up in the front yard of Edward's house, nicely decorated with fern plants and colourful paper garlands. At the entrance was an arch supported by two plantain trees, with bunches of fruit hanging from it and the word "Welcome" written across its top. There were rows of benches and chairs in the pandal for the guests.

The wedding was to take place at 10 a.m. The bridegroom's party was expected to reach the bride's place at 9.30 a.m. They were to be served with some refreshments and then both parties were to go to the church for the marriage ceremony.

As the guests came in they were received by Edward and his near relatives. The ladies came dressed in bright sarees.

They were taken into the house where they could greet the bride and have some refreshments. The men sat in the pandal. At nine excitement ran high. According to custom, Jane's brother was to garland the bridegroom before he stepped into the pandal. Edward had asked him to be present there and not to slip away. A nephew of Edward was ready to sprinkle rose-water on the bridegroom and his party.

Some ladies related to Jane were helping her with her dress in the house. One of them was decorating her hair with flowers. Young volunteers were ready with the refreshments to be served to the bridegroom's party. By 9.30 all the arrangements were complete. Some boys eagerly dashed off to the road to watch the bridegroom's party coming. But there was no sign of them. However, everyone knew that a slight delay was not unusual on such occasions. They waited patiently. But it struck 10 and yet the party did not arrive. Fifteen minutes more passed and still there was no sign of the bridegroom. Colachel, the groom's town, was only four miles away. Edward consulted his brothers and some other elders. They decided to send two near relatives by taxi to the bridegroom's house to hurry them up.

Meanwhile, the bridegroom's house in Colachel was in great confusion. The party had hired three cars and three vans to go to Neyoor. The vehicles were already there and everyone was getting ready to start. They had decided to leave by 9 a.m. The bridegroom, George, had his bath and began to dress.

Suddenly he began to shiver.



"I am feeling cold, very cold. Maybe I got fever," he told his brother-in-law who was helping him with his dress. "I just want to lie down," he said. His brother-in-law helped him to go to bed.

In bed George began to shiver violently. He said, "I think I am going to have an attack of malaria. I am feeling very cold. Please cover me up with a blanket."

The brother-in-law put a blanket over him and ran to George's father, Anbiah. He told him about the bridegroom's sudden illness. George's mother also came to know of it. She rushed to her son.

George's shivering increased so much that he could only be held down by two persons. He could not even talk. The news spread that the bridegroom had suddenly been taken ill. Everyone began to crowd into the room.

"Oh, what shall we do now?" Anbiah nervously asked.

His eldest brother's son, Gnanam was also present. He too was employed in a tea estate in the hills. He cleared the room of all unwanted persons. When he saw George shivering, he said, "I think he is having an attack of malaria. This fever is very common in the estates. Please call a doctor. He would just give him a quinine injection and he will be all right." Two persons were sent to bring the doctor.

Soon the shivering passed and George said that he was feeling very hot. He threw away the blankets covering him.

"Give him a cup of hot coffee," suggested Gnanam.

"Will he be all right?" asked Anbiah anxiously.

"Of course," replied Gnanam. "Sometimes I also suffer

from malaria in the estates where I work. Whenever I have an attack, I go to the estate hospital, take an injection and then I go right on with my job. When George is given an injection he will immediately be fit to start for the wedding."

"Is malaria dangerous to life?" asked Anbiah.

"There is a type of malaria, called malignant malaria. That is very dangerous. At times people die within twenty-four hours, if they are not treated properly at once. But of course, you need not be anxious about George. He is not suffering from that type of malaria."

"I understand that malaria enlarges the spleen and the liver of the sufferer."

"Yes, but that happens only when proper treatment is not given. Years ago, at least one fourth of the children in the estates suffered from enlarged spleen and liver. If proper treatment could not be given, such a person could even die. Thanks to the effective treatment of malaria, now it is rare to find such children."

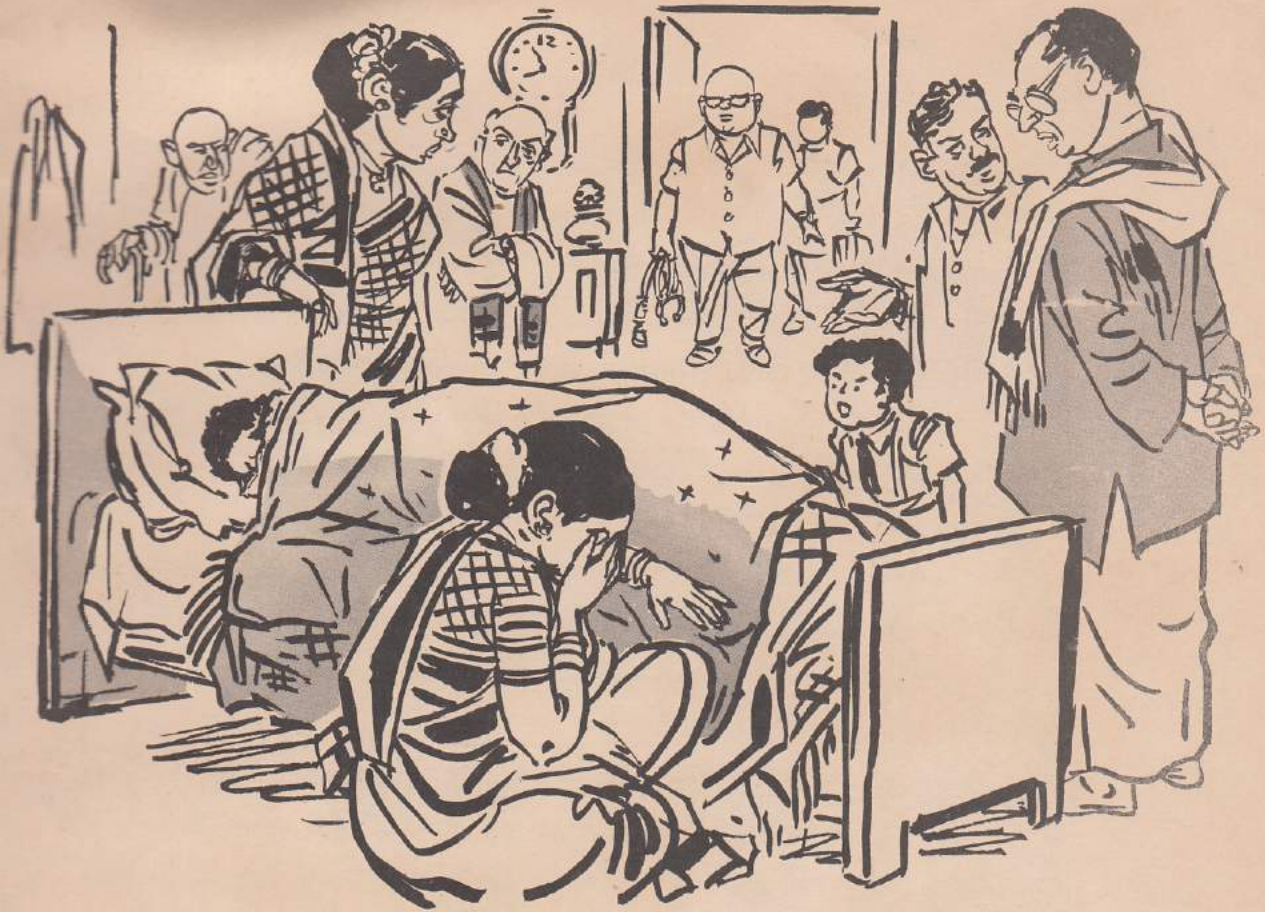
"How could George get malaria? He was quite normal when he went to the estates?"

"A person gets it when the mosquitoes bite him."

"What nonsense!" said Anbiah. "We have so many of them here but we don't suffer from malaria."

"Doctors say that it is not caused by every mosquito. There is one particular class, called Anopheles. When it pricks us then only we get malaria. So, malaria will occur only where mosquitoes of this class exist," replied Gnanam.

"Oh, it is past 9.30! What will the bridge's people think

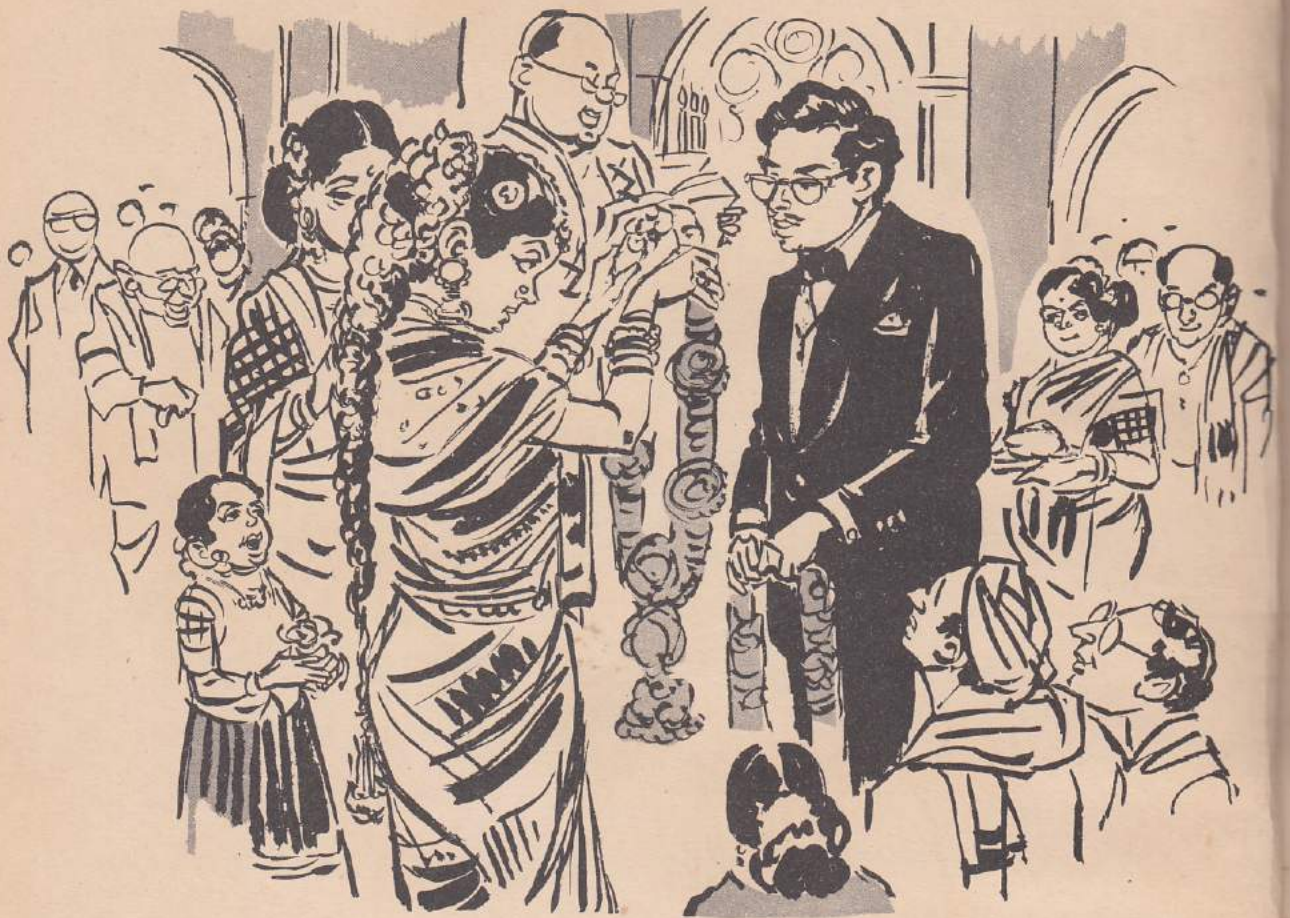


of us? I wonder if he will be fit enough to go at all. He cannot even stand up," said George's mother.

"The fever will come down soon. He would be quite fit to go," replied Gnanam. But if he does not get an injection now, the fever would recur the day after tomorrow. In this type of malaria the fever occurs on alternate days. In malignant type one gets fever continuously."

"The doctor has come," announced one of the men who had gone to fetch him.

The doctor examined George. He confirmed that George was having an attack of malaria. He gave him an injection and said, "He will be all right within no time. Even now he



can get up and start dressing.”

Anbiah's brother-in-law rushed in. He said, “Two men have come from the bride's place ; they want to know why we are late.”

Anbiah was perplexed. ^{oatam} “What shall I tell them ? ”

“Leave it to me,” said Gnanam. “No harm in telling the truth.”

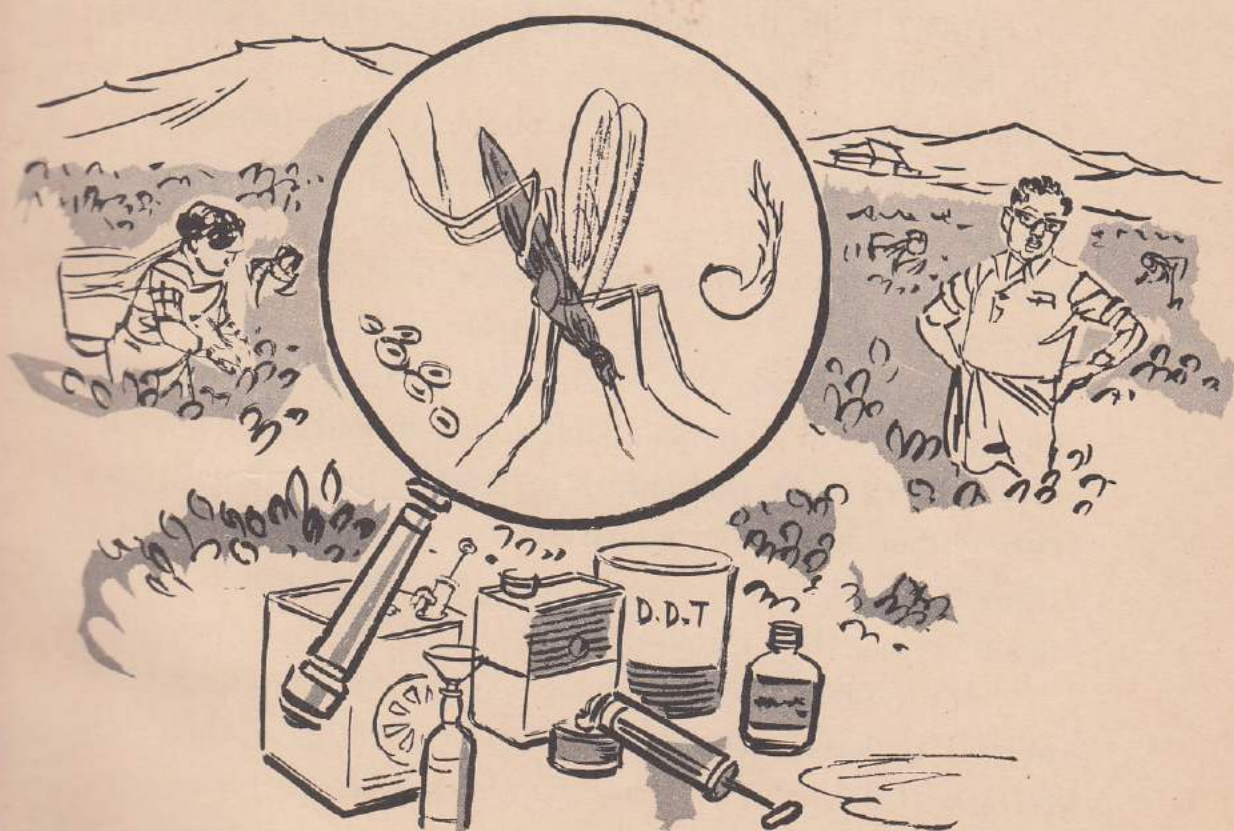
He told the man what had happened. He even assured

them that the groom's party would leave for Neyoor within fifteen minutes. The men then left.

Thanks to the injection given by the doctor, George and Jane were soon married.

"Malaria had nearly killed our happiness," remarked Anbiah.

"Yes," said Gnanam, "malaria is one of the greatest enemies of mankind. It is also one of the world's greatest killers.



"They have almost succeeded in getting rid of malaria in the estates," he continued, "but it's a pity that it still troubles many villages and towns in the plains in spite of the National Malaria Eradication Programme.

"The estates are small places. Things can be looked after there. But for the success of such plans in the entire country the full cooperation of the people is necessary.

"It is very unfortunate that people do not cooperate. The Programme aims at destroying the mosquito which causes malaria. It also seeks eliminate the parasites of malaria that live in the red blood corpuscles of man by treating the sufferers.

"D.D.T. kills the mosquito effectively. It is sprayed in the breeding places of the mosquito to destroy its larva. It is too bad that in spite of all the publicity many people allow water to stagnate in their compounds. It becomes a breeding place for mosquitoes. And just because of a little inconvenience, they would not even have their houses sprayed properly.

"Only last week, the Programme workers were distributing drugs free to all persons suffering from malaria in Trivandrum. They were attempting to destroy the malarial parasites in their blood. If the parasites are destroyed the disease cannot spread even if mosquitoes bite. But people are so ignorant that they throw away the pills."

"It's too bad," said the uncle. "How can the Programme to end malaria succeed unless the people give their full co-operation."



-ironic

Yells at Night

Dr Gopal lived in Coimbatore. His house was in a newly developed colony facing a large maidan. The road running past the house had very little traffic even in daytime. At night the whole area was very quiet.

One night Dr Gopal and his family were fast asleep. Suddenly a loud noise awoke them. It sounded like a yell.

"What is that?" asked Gopal's wife and daughter simultaneously.

"God knows!" replied Dr Gopal indifferently.

Immediately there came another yell. Their blood ran cold. The sound seemed to come from the maidan. Dr



Gopal's dogs began to bark furiously. They dashed against the closed gate in alarm.

Gopal jumped out of his bed and opened the door to the balcony. He flashed a torch towards the maidan. The beam of light revealed the figure of a woman. Her head was shaved and even as Dr Gopal stood watching she raised her hands to the skies and yelled.

"Who is there?" the doctor shouted.

Yet another yell was all the answer.

"What do you want?" he shouted again.

Another yell.

"Seems to be a mad woman," he told his wife and daughter who were looking out of the window.

Then they noticed two torch lights blazing at the far end of the maidan. Two men were approaching the woman from

that end. They called out to the woman but she only cried back at them. They came to her. Dr Gopal could see that they were trying to make her go with them. But the woman refused and yelled at them.

The doctor, his wife and daughter went to bed. But they were too disturbed to sleep. Every now and then the yell kept coming.

Next morning the family were having breakfast when they heard some confused noises out in the maidan. Gopal went out to see what was the matter. He found several men trying to get the woman to go with them. But she was resisting their attempts with a strength surprising in a woman. In the end, the men forcibly carried her away.

"Poor woman," said the daughter. "She seems to be so young."

"I wonder why she has not been placed in a mental hospital for her treatment," said the wife. "Her people seem to be well off. Tell me, is mental disorder curable now?"

"Medical Science has advanced a great deal in the last twenty years," replied the doctor. "If mental patients are given modern treatment at a very early stage of the disease, they stand at least fifty per cent chance of becoming normal. I know of many cases where mental disease was completely cured. Those patients are now as normal as any other man. Unfortunately, many people, particularly the uneducated, don't realize the value of proper and early treatment. Even today, some people think that mental disease is caused by an evil spirit. Of course, centuries ago mental patients were kept

in chains and were beaten mercilessly to drive away the supposed devil.

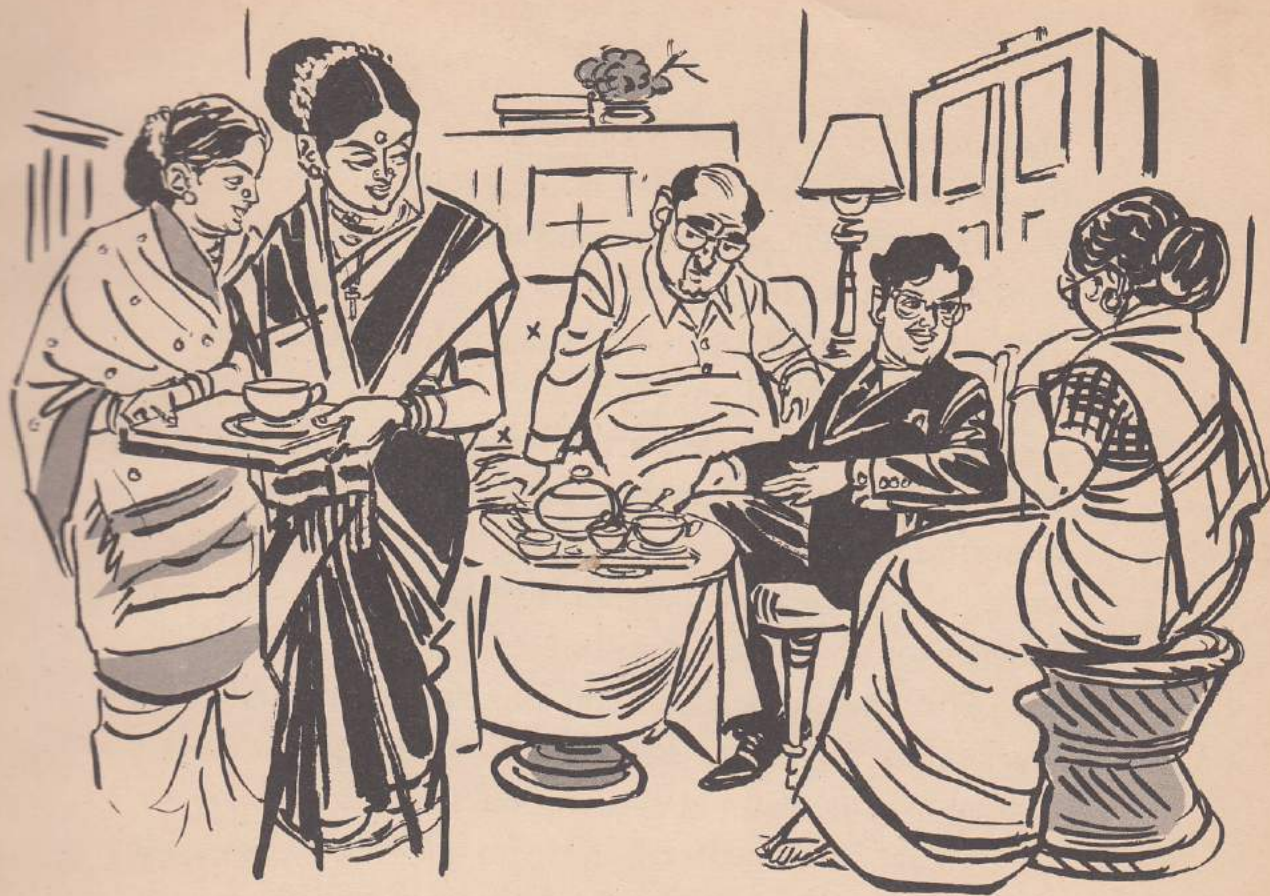
"It is not realized by many that mental disease is due to physical and psychological reasons. They ridicule the mad man when they find one in a street. And children only follow the example of their elders and throw stones at such persons and laugh at them. What is needed is some publicity to tell the public that a mental disorder is just like any other physical disease, say, typhoid and pneumonia. No one would dream of throwing stones at a patient suffering from pneumonia or typhoid. So also mental cases should be treated with consideration and kindness."

"Father," said his daughter, "If you ever happen to hear anything more about this unfortunate woman, please do let us know."

"Oh, I will," he replied. "This incident reminds me of a tragic case of mental illness. It came to my knowledge early in my professional career."

"Please tell us about it," said the daughter.

"Well," said the father, "once I had practised in Tinnevely. There was a man over sixty. His name was Vincent. He had retired as a guard in the Southern Railway. He had such a loud voice that among his friends he was known as the 'loud-speaker'. I was his family doctor and he often used to drop in at my clinic for a chat. His daughter, Lucy, was at the women's college. She was doing her B.A. Vincent was very keen that his daughter should be married as early as possible.



“One day he came to me and told me that Lucy was going to be married.

“‘Good news! Tell me all about it, I said.’

“‘Well, the boy is a distant relative. His mother is my second cousin. Her parents had left this place when she was very young. They had settled in Bombay. And only a fortnight ago she surprised me by coming to my house. Her son also came with her. A graduate. He is an officer in Burmah Oil Company. He is tall, good-looking and is always smartly dressed. My cousin told me that she had come to find a bride for her son. She wanted a girl from this place, you know, so that her old ties with this place might continue.

Well, to cut a long story short, the mother and the son liked my daughter and Lucy also liked the boy.'

"I congratulated Vincent and then he went away.

"After a month, I went to their wedding reception. Vincent introduced me to the bridegroom. I found the young man handsome and smart, though I felt that he was very nervous. And when he started talking he could never stop; words came out at a running speed and, it seemed to me, almost against his will. But the bride was very happy, all smiles. A week later they left for Bombay. I could not see Vincent for about four months.

"Then, suddenly, one night he came to my clinic. I was shocked to see him. He looked several years older. It seemed as if he had not slept for days.

"'What is the matter? Are you not well?' I asked him.

"He seized my hands. Tears came down his face as he cried, 'Doctor, my daughter is ruined! ^{she is} She has married a mad man!'

"'What?' I asked, stunned.

"'Yes, doctor, yes. We have been cheated. My own cousin has cheated me. She has ruined my Lucy's life.'

"Sobs shook his body. He remained silent for some time. I did not disturb him either. Then he said, 'It is now four months since my daughter left for Bombay. For a month her letters told us about all her happiness at Bombay. Then her letters became less frequent. ^{all} We thought that she was settling down in her new life. Then came a letter which hinted that all was not well. After some days, we again



had a letter saying that her husband was coming home late at night and that once she had found him drunk. We were deeply grieved. I also wrote a strong letter to my cousin. 'Suddenly, after a fortnight, I received a telegram from Lucy. She had asked me to reach Bombay at once as she wanted to come back with me. I took the next train to Bombay. I was shocked to hear there that her husband had gone mad. He was locked up in a room. When I saw him, he could not recognize me and spat at me. I went to see the doctor who was treating him. From him I learnt that my son-in-law had two similar attacks of insanity before and his parents had been warned not to get him married. It seems that a quack



had told them that these attacks were due to what he called love sickness and that after marriage he would be all right. Unfortunately, the parents believed him. Since everybody in the place knew about his illness, he could not get a bride there. So my cousin came over here and we fell into the trap. Oh, oh, Lucy's life is now ruined !'

"I felt very sorry for Lucy and his father. I gave him some sleeping pills. Both the father and his daughter needed them."

Lucy never went to her husband again.

Good Beginning

It was the time of Deepawali. The people of Coimbatore were celebrating the festival with great enthusiasm. The year 1960 had been a lucky one for them. The mills and factories had worked to full capacity and the workers had earned good wages throughout the year. They had also got their annual bonus just before Deepawali. The monsoon had been good. People in villages around the town too had enough money to celebrate the festival with joy.

A month before the festival, shops were colourfully decorated with festoons and balloons. They were brightly illuminated. Many had rows and rows of twinkling lights. The people crowded the shops till late at night.

The streets presented a joyous scene. One such street was Kaliappa Mudali street. Mostly mill workers and clerks lived here. The mill hands were quite well-off. They had even more money than the clerks. They celebrated Deepawali with great enthusiasm.

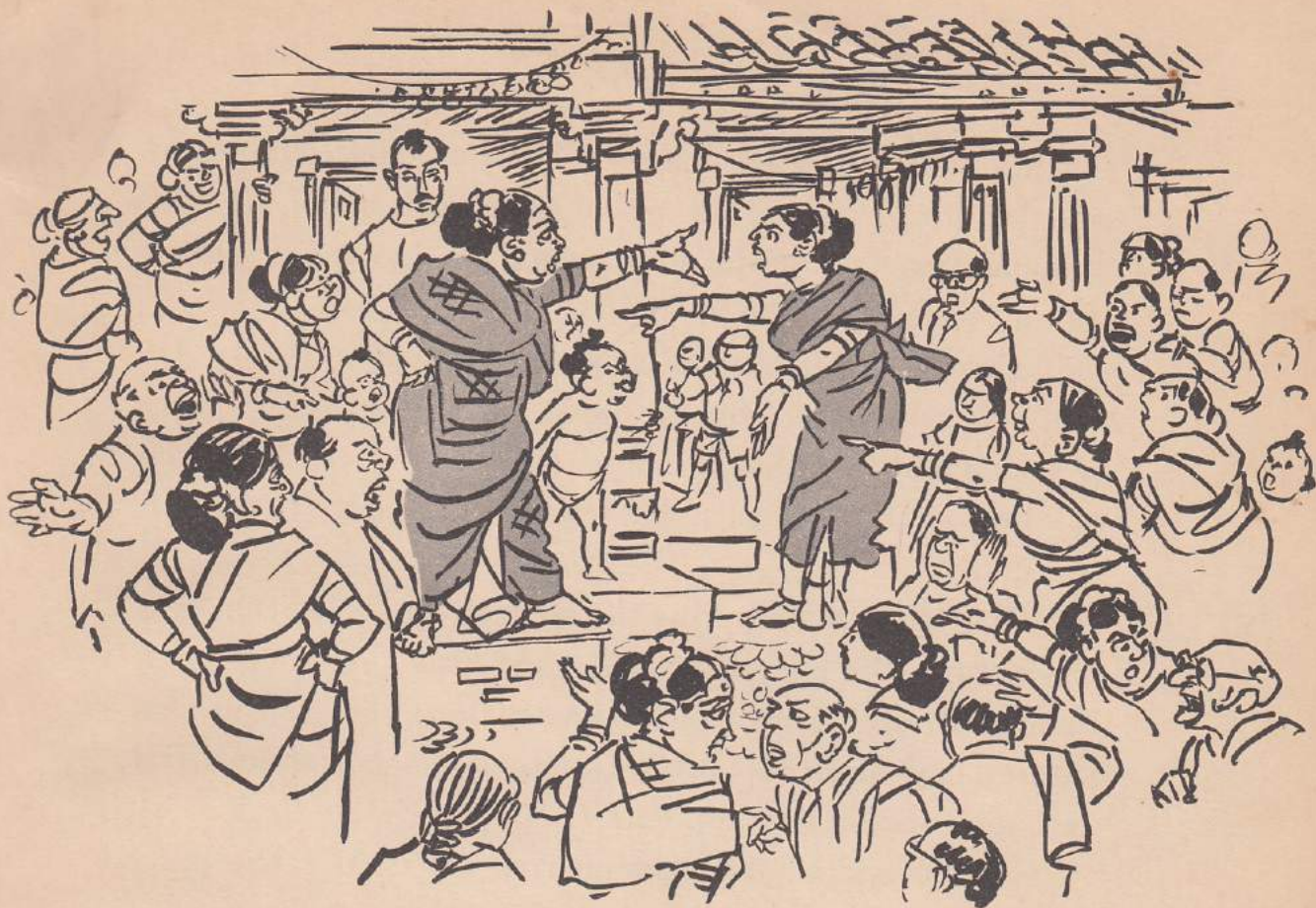
Sundaram was a mill worker who lived in this street. He had studied only up to the seventh standard. His wife Komathy could just read and write. But they both worked at a textile mill and earned about three hundred rupees a

month between them. They had four children. The eldest, Neelavani, was about fourteen. She had studied up to the eighth class. Next was Rajan. He was twelve years old. Kamala was two years younger. And the youngest was Muthu, who was six. They had a part-time woman who worked for them. She did the cleaning, washing and other house work like grinding.

To the left of Sundarams' house lived a clerk who worked in the Collectorate. His name was Ramakrishnan. He was a graduate but he earned less than two hundred rupees per month. His wife, Vasantha, had to do the household work all by herself. They could not afford any servant. They had two children. The elder was a girl, Uma by name. She was ten years old. Her younger brother was seven. His name was Ramu.

Although they were neighbours, Vasantha and Komathy were not on good terms. Komathy thought poorly of Vasantha because she did not have a servant. Her children dressed well but the children of Vasantha had only the cheapest clothes. On her part Vasantha considered Komathy a snob. She hated her. Vasantha was always lost in the dreams about the days when her husband would be promoted a Naib Tehasildar. She would then not only have a part-time help but also a peon from the office.

During the festival, relations between the two neighbours became still more strained. Komathy's children had a lot of new dresses and fireworks. Vasantha could not get her children as much.



On the day of Deepawali, Vasantha had an early bath. She put on her new saree and came out into the street. She cleaned the portion of the street in front of her house, sprinkled it with water and began to draw a 'Kolam'. She skillfully drew a detailed design and then drew two smaller ones, one on each side of it. Then she went inside the house.

Just then, Komathy's maid, a girl of seventeen, came out and began to clean their portion of the street prior to drawing 'Kolam'. Komathy's youngest child also came out to ease himself in the street. As the maid was cleaning the ground, the child went to one side and sat on the 'Kolam' which Vasantha had drawn. Vasantha happened to see it.

There followed a bitter quarrel. Vasantha abused Komathy and her maid. They did not mince words either. Ramakrishnan came out but failed to calm them. A crowd gathered and the people also took sides in the quarrel.

Then, a young man in spotless khadi came there. He said in a loud voice, "Stop! Stop quarrelling, please! What a shame that we should abuse each other on Deepawali morning. Tell me what is the matter. Let us try to settle it peacefully."

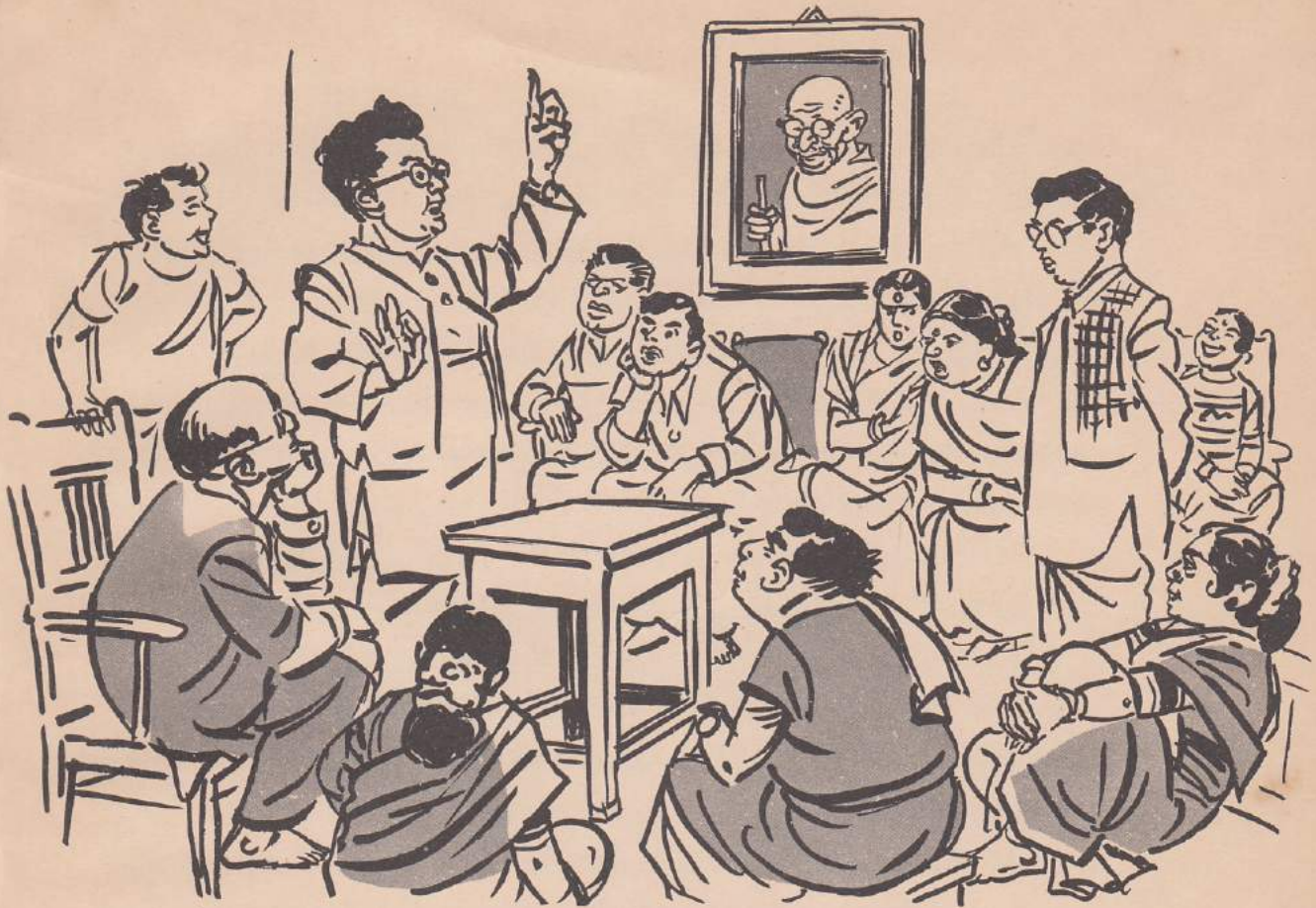
The young man lived in the same street. His name was Govindraj. He had done B.Sc. and was preparing for a Public Service Commission examination. He spent his leisure hours in social work. He was a member of Seva Dal and other similar organisations.

He was told all about the quarrel. He said, "This practice of allowing children to ease themselves on the road is very dirty. I have even seen elders doing it in the small hours. In our villages people do it. But why in the towns? Here every house has a toilet. There is no excuse for dirtying the street. This practice spreads many a disease. If some of you would be good enough to come to my place tomorrow, we will discuss it. Today it is a festival. Let us go home and celebrate Deepawali."

The crowd disappeared.

The next evening some young men turned up at Govindraj's house. They discussed the subject of cleanliness.

"We know the old proverb," said Govindraj, "'Cleanliness is next to Godliness.' Gandhiji always preached cleanli-



ness and practised it. Nobody would consider us a cultured people if we don't keep our towns and villages clean. Besides, flies breed where there is filth and dirt. The germs of cholera, dysentery and typhoid are present in the excreta of patients. If such excreta are left in the open, flies settle on them and carry the germs to the exposed food. Naturally, when anyone eats this food he is likely to get the disease. In this way the fly spreads cholera and typhoid."

"How disgusting!" exclaimed a young man. "I never knew that the fly is so dangerous. I will tell my mother and sister about it."

"I am sure you will," said Govindraj. "But the important thing is that the children should not be allowed to use the streets as latrines in the first place. All of us should let our women know it. In the Western countries diseases like typhoid, dysentery and cholera have practically disappeared. This could be done there only because their cities have hygienic water supply and they are very clean, no one makes the streets dirty."

"Suppose, we form a committee to teach cleanliness to our people," suggested a man whose name was Ramaswamy.

"It is an excellent idea," said Govindraj.

And the committee was formed. Besides five members, Govindraj was elected its chairman and Ramaswamy the secretary.

Govindraj said that one should begin with one's own house and street. Others would follow the example. Each one of them promised to do his best. The committee set to work immediately.

Ramaswamy went to his house and explained to his wife how flies spread diseases and why children should not use roads as latrines.

At this stage his grandmother joined him, "I have lived here for the last sixty years. Earlier there were no sweepers even. Pigs and dogs did all the cleaning. But I did not die of any disease! Let my child use the road. And I will see to it that nobody comes in his way."

Fortunately, Ramaswamy's father returned from his work just then. He was told about the argument and he

told his wife and mother that Ramaswamy was correct. "I am all for it," he said. "From now onwards, he shall use the latrine and not go out to the road."

Ramaswamy felt very happy. He told the other volunteers of the committee about his success in his home. But he came to know that others were not that successful. However, Govindraj assured them that old habits die hard and that if they continued their efforts, people would take to clean living ultimately.

On a Sunday evening, two weeks later, the volunteers assembled at Govindraj's place for a meeting. They found him returning from somewhere.

"Sorry if I am late," he said. "I had gone to the hospital. My friend's grandfather had gone out and he slipped on a banana skin in a street. His thigh bone is broken."

"What a pity," said one of the young men, "that people throw away banana skins so carelessly and cause accidents."

"This throwing out of dirt and refuse in the streets is another bad habit. The municipality has provided bins for the disposal of waste. But housewives don't use them. Let us add one more item to our campaign. We should tell our women not to throw garbage everywhere. Only the bins should be used," said Govindraj.

Everybody agreed with him.

"The trouble is," continued Govindraj, "that people think that things worth doing are only brave deeds and grand sacrifices. Now, not everybody is called upon to shed his blood for the country. What matters is that we should



do our small, routine duties sincerely. For example we should keep our houses and streets clean. It would result in better health for our countrymen. And this is no small service."

Nothing to Hide

Pandian was a young man employed as a stenographer in one of the tea estates in South India. He had married the sister of one of his old classmates. Her name was Kamala.

It was a fine sunny day in May when the bride and groom returned to the estate after their marriage. Kamala was delighted to see her husband's house. It was on the top of a small hill. There were tea fields on three sides and on the fourth side was a small jungle. There were a variety of birds and the mornings and evenings were full of their twitterings. The afternoons were not dull either. Kamala could see the black monkeys jumping about on the



trees in the jungle. On Sunday evenings Kamala used to go for a stroll with Pandian. They would sit by the side of a small river and enjoy the peace and charm of nature. Kamala never knew the countryside could be so charming. Thus, two months passed happily for them.

June brought the first monsoon rains. And in two weeks the monsoon had set in. It rained heavily, sending roaring streams down the hills. Kamala could not see the sun for days together.

In July the air grew very cold and damp. Kamala had to take out her woolen sweaters. She found the water bitingly cold. At night, even two blankets were not enough to keep her warm. Kamala longed for the monsoon to end soon. But Pandian told her that it would continue till the middle of November. That dejected her. Pandian tried to cheer her up. But her gloominess increased. She began to complain of loss of appetite. She felt weak and gradually started losing weight.

After a few days she took to bed and Pandian noticed that she was having temperature in the evenings. Twice he took her to the estate hospital. The doctor gave her some pills. But she did not improve. On the contrary, she developed a cough which kept her awake throughout the night.

Pandian was worried. He sent a telegram to his father-in-law, Dorai Raj. He arrived with his wife the next day. Kamala's cough grew worse. Pandian consulted the local doctor who advised him to take his wife to the Government

Hospital at Coimbatore for an X-Ray examination of the lungs. Pandian and his mother-in-law went to the Government Hospital. There it was found that poor Kamala was suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs.

Pandian was stunned.

"Both the lungs are affected," said the doctor. "Is there any history of anyone in the family having suffered from tuberculosis? Or, did your wife herself ever have illness like this before, I mean during her childhood?"

"I had better ask her mother," replied Pandian.

Then he asked his wife and his mother-in-law. He was told that there was no history of tuberculosis in their family and that Kamala did not have any such illness before.

The next day Pandian informed the doctor accordingly. He asked, "Doctor, is tuberculosis a hereditary disease?"

"No," replied the doctor.

"Then, how did Kamala get the disease?"

The doctor said, "When a T.B. patient coughs, he gives out the germs of this disease in the air. People living in close contact with him inhale the germs with that air. Over ninety per cent sufferers get the disease in this way. That is why I wanted to know if anyone in your wife's family had ever suffered from it."

"But neither in my wife's family nor in mine is there any history of T.B. I wonder how she caught the infection?" asked Pandian.

"Tuberculosis is a disease which is widespread," replied the doctor. "Its germs survive for long in the air. They are

present in the air of towns, especially in the crowded cities and those places which are not properly ventilated. People living in such places are constantly exposed to the infection.

"But such exposure to the germs alone is not enough. Those who have some disease or take poor food or live in overcrowded places lose their health. When one's general health is lowered, one's body cannot resist the germs of the disease. Such persons are likely to get T.B."

As the doctor recommended, Kamala was taken to a sanatorium. Her mother remained with her while Pandian returned to his work in the estate. Once a month he came to see his wife there. For a month she was given injections daily and she got rid of the fever. After two months more she ceased to have any cough. She felt definitely better.

When her husband visited her next, she had put on some weight and looked nearly normal.

"Oh, I am all right now," she was all smiles. "Now please ask the doctor when I could be allowed to go home."

The doctor said that Kamala had progressed very well but she would have to stay for at least two more months for further treatment. Only then could he allow her to go. But he warned that she would have to take treatment in the estate also. "She must take injections twice a week without fail and also take regularly the medicines which I will prescribe. After three months you must bring her here again for a check-up."

"Doctor," asked Pandian, "what precautions should I take so that none should get the disease from my wife at home?"



“The germs of the disease affecting her body have been killed. Nobody can get the disease from her now,” replied the doctor. “But please see to it that she gets plenty of fresh air and plenty of rich food. Good food and fresh air prevent the disease. They also help in curing it. She should also have food containing vitamins A and D. They are essential to build the resistance of the body to the disease. Milk and milk products, eggs and fresh vegetables have these vitamins. Shark oil is also very rich in these vitamins. I have asked the hospital dietician—the diet-expert—to advise your wife about the food she should take.”

On the day when Kamala was allowed to leave the hospital, the dietician came to her. He advised her to maintain good health by taking a balanced diet.

“What is a balanced diet?” asked Kamala.

“We need carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals for our healthy growth. A balanced diet means that it has all these essential things in proper proportions. Even the food taken by the ignorant rich is not balanced. It could be rich in fats, carbohydrates and proteins, but it might lack vitamins and minerals. For a balanced diet one should take ghee and butter for fats, rice for carbohydrates, dal, beans, peas and Bengal gram for proteins, milk products and milk, fresh fruit and vegetables for vitamins and minerals. The non-vegetarians could add eggs and meat to their diet.” The dietician explained everything. He also gave her a diet chart which she was to follow.

Kamala left the sanatorium and stayed for a month at her

mother's place at Pollachi. Then Pandian took her to the estate. Kamala was very careful not to neglect the injections, medicines and the required diet. She recovered fast.

One day she was having tea with her husband. It was a Sunday evening and Pandian was quite free of his official duties. "Now you look healthier and even more beautiful than you were when I married you," he remarked.

"Do I?" laughed Kamala. She hesitated for some time and then asked, "Will you be angry if I tell you something?"

"What have you to confess?" he asked in good humour.

"No, I am serious. First, promise me that you will forgive me and my parents."

"Well, I promise."

"I did not get T.B. for the first time. Two years before my marriage, I had had this same illness."

Pandian was slightly irritated. "Why didn't you tell me when I asked you about it?"

"Because we thought it was unnecessary to tell you," said Kamala.

Pandian was silent. It came to his mind that, maybe, Kamala's parents and her brother, who was his old classmate, trapped him into marrying a girl suffering from T.B. But then he dismissed the suspicion. He remembered that it was he who had wanted to marry Kamala. It was just by chance that he had met his classmate after many years in the Pollachi bazar. He had gone to his place with him, and had seen Kamala and liked her.

When Kamala saw that her husband was silent, she

thought that he was angry. She began to weep.

“Oh, no” he said. “I am not angry. It was not your fault that you did not tell me about your illness. Please tell me all about it.”

Kamala was much relieved. She replied, “When I was sixteen, I had an attack of cough and began getting temperature in the evenings. It was found that one of my lungs had got T.B. infection. I was treated for six months and became quite well. The doctor had advised that the treatment should go on for a few months more. But my parents thought that the longer it continued, the more people would come to know of it. And it won't do any good to a girl still unmarried. I was also tired of taking injections and then, I thought that I was normal. So the treatment was cut short—with the result that I had to go through it all over again.”

When Pandian took her to the sanatorium for a check-up, he told the doctor about her first illness.

“How foolish people are!” said the doctor. “With the modern drugs, the disease is rapidly brought under control. All the symptoms disappear, the patient feels normal and even puts on weight. So, the people think that he is completely cured and discontinue the treatment. Had she got full treatment, as advised by her doctor, she wouldn't have got this second attack. Now, she must continue the treatment for another year. And do remember, rich food and fresh air are essential. And don't forget to bring her here once every three months for a check-up.”

“Thank you ever so much, doctor,” said Pandian. “I



will follow all your instructions.”

“When you go to our office for paying the bill, please do buy some T.B. Seals.”

“What are they?” asked Pandian.

“A T.B. Seal is just like a postal stamp. It can be used to seal letters. It is sold to the public at ten paise per seal. T.B. is a widespread disease, especially among the poor. Now you know, how costly the treatment is. Most of the Indians

cannot afford it by themselves. The Government has to provide for them. Besides, X-ray examination can detect the disease at very early stage. The cough and the evening fever come at a later stage. Then the treatment becomes complicated. But this X-ray business is a costly affair. And hundreds of thousands of people suspected of having T.B. are X-rayed. We have a national campaign to remove T.B. All this costs a lot of money. So, those who are fortunate enough to help their poor countrymen, should do it by buying the T.B. Seals. It is only by the cooperation and support of all citizens that the fight against T.B. can be carried out."

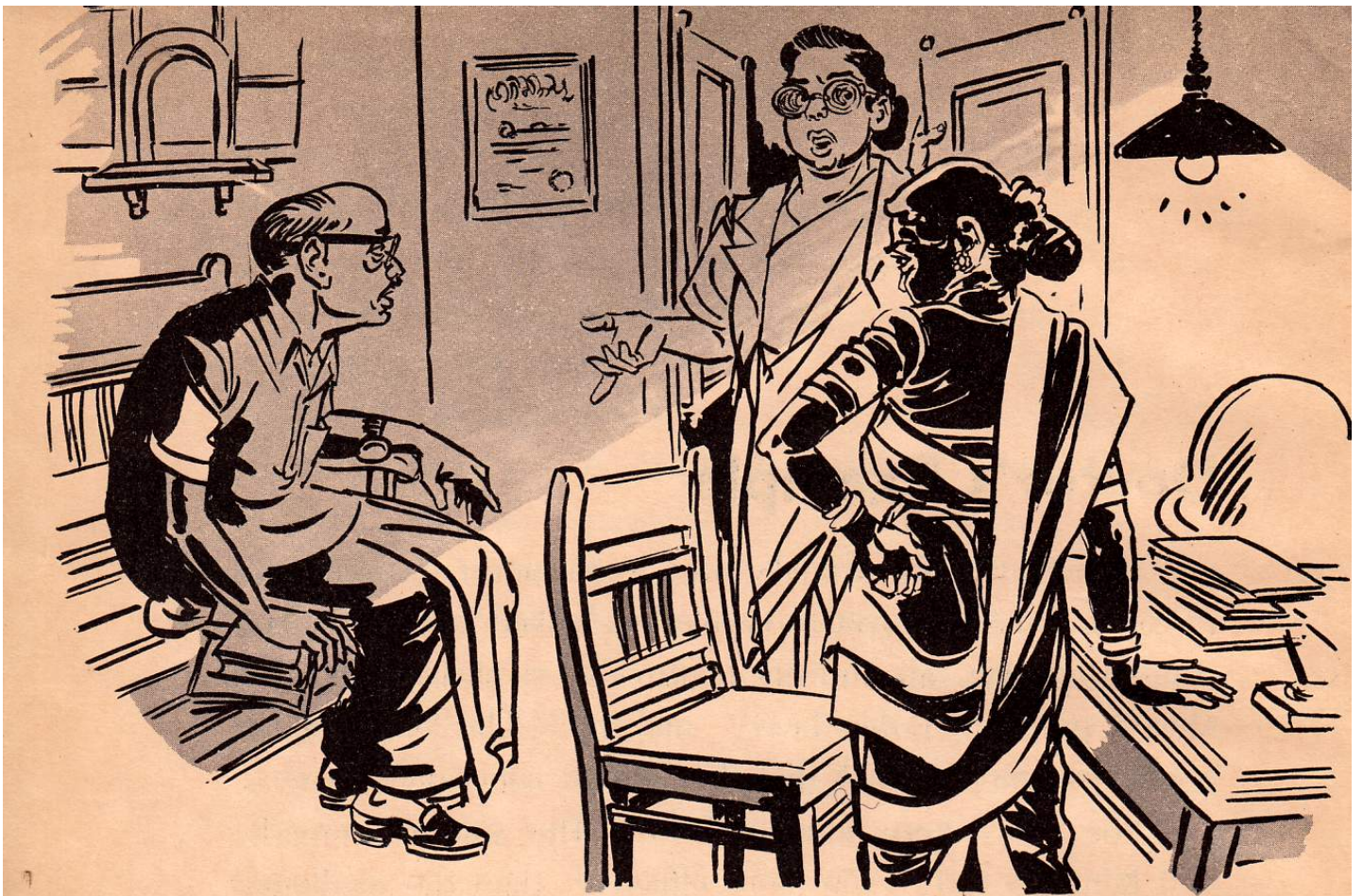
Doctor's Example

Dr Bhaggyam Kamala was a specialist in children's diseases. She was over forty-five but looked younger. Her complexion was fair and her features were pleasant, but she always put on a rather heavy makeup. The lenses of her spectacles were so thick that they almost concealed her eyes.

She was a very popular doctor. Her smiles, sympathy and kindness were even more effective than the medicines which she prescribed. She earned a lot and had set up a huge clinic. All the same, she never neglected the poor. She was helped by a woman pharmacist and an elderly woman attendant. The name of the attendant was Lakshmi. It was her duty to receive the patients and send them to the doctor.

One evening the clinic was unusually crowded. Lakshmi knew that the doctor would have to give an extra half-hour. She never wanted the doctor to tire herself by keeping long hours. Also, it meant that she too would be delayed.

It was 7.30 — half an hour later than the usual closing time, an ordinary-looking middle-aged man came in and quietly sat down in a chair in the corner. Lakshmi noticed him and lost her temper, "Some people have no idea of the



time,” she remarked in a frankly loud voice. “They think that the doctor should be available to them till midnight.”

The doctor heard it and rushed out of her consultation room. She sharply told Lakshmi, “I have told you many, many times that you must behave. If you cannot, you will have to find another job.”

The visitor coughed. “Madam,” he said, “I am terribly sorry for being so late. I had to discuss a delicate thing with you. I thought it better to come to you when you are not busy with your patients.”

“It is all right,” assured the doctor. “Please don’t mind what my attendant has said. What is the matter?”

"The problem is," the middle-aged man replied, "that my wife is a graduate, she is a teacher, but she would not allow our child to be vaccinated. If you please, I could bring her to you tomorrow. I am sure, you can convince her that vaccination is absolutely necessary."

"Oh, by all means. Do bring her to me tomorrow at this very hour," the doctor replied with enthusiasm. "How old is your child?"

"My daughter is just four years old."

"And what has your wife got to say against vaccination?"

"She says that it is against her conscience because it is against her religion. I am so worried about our child. Last month, my friend's child died of small-pox. My friend had no religious objection against vaccination. He was careless and indifferent and went on postponing the vaccination of his child."

The next evening the visitor came with his wife, Mary. The doctor requested the husband to wait in the reception room and took the wife to the consultation room. She adjusted the soft light to illuminate Mary's face.

Dr Kamala could quite see that Mary was irritated. She did not like the idea of an outsider having a say in their family matter.

The doctor was clever enough not to open the subject abruptly. She talked about Mary's home-town and about this and that. She would tactfully put brief questions and then would patiently listen to the detailed answers. Mary

felt that the doctor was a very friendly and sympathetic lady.

They touched upon many subjects and then Mary herself told the doctor that her husband was very much worried because she did not want their child to be vaccinated.

“Why don’t you want your child to be vaccinated, Mary?” the doctor asked.

“Because my mother says that God protects us from all the troubles. If you have vaccinations and inoculations, which are supposed to prevent diseases, it shows want of faith in God. Is it not a sin, doctor?”

The doctor smiled, “I assure you that I too have full faith in God. But tell me, do you believe that God has given us hands and feet?”

“Yes?”

“When you are in trouble,” Dr Kamala asked, “would you mind defending yourself with your hands?”

“Why, no?”

“And, it won’t mean any lack of faith in God?”

“Nothing like that.”

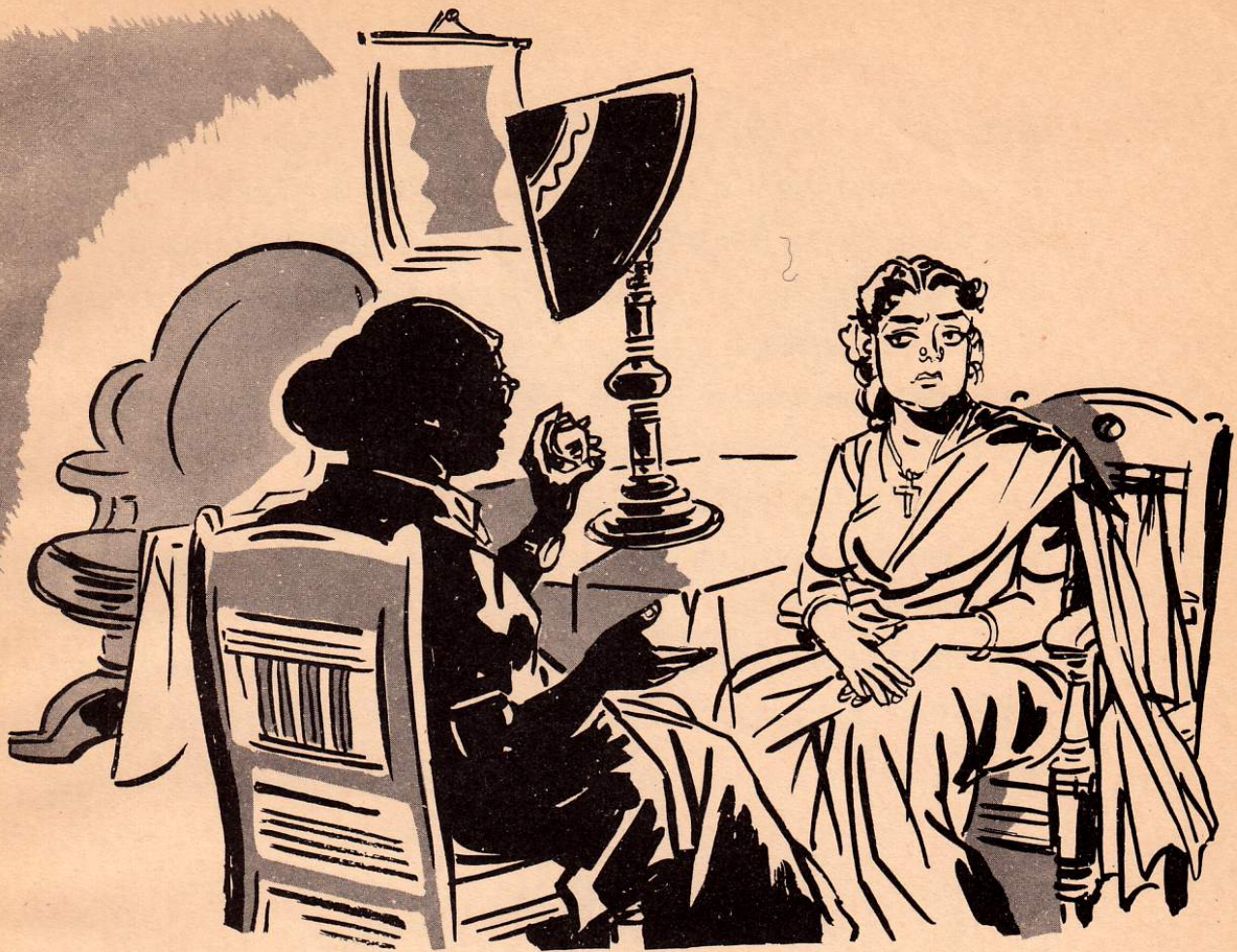
“Now,” the doctor continued, “do you believe that God has given us intelligence, and that we have used it to acquire knowledge, and that Medical Science is a part of our knowledge?”

“You are right,” Mary replied.

Then why should one not use Medical Science to protect oneself?” the doctor demanded.

Mary was confused. She remained silent.

The doctor said, “Let’s take another example. Suppose



you see a baby in a street and notice a car speeding towards her. What would you do ? ”

Mary hesitated. “ I would rush and pick up the baby.”

“ Exactly ! Because you know that the baby cannot protect herself,” the doctor said. “ Now suppose, small-pox is spreading in your town and your child is in the danger of getting the infection. Would it not be your responsibility to get your child vaccinated ? ”

Mary kept silent. But the doctor knew that she was doing some hard thinking.

“ There is yet another aspect of the problem,” the doctor

said. "You know, small-pox is a most contagious disease. If your child gets it, the children in your neighbourhood are also likely to get the infection from your child. If you do not get your child vaccinated it is a sin against the whole society. It is, therefore, necessary that every child should be vaccinated.

Mary remained silent. The doctor realized that a struggle was going on in her mind.

"Let me give you my personal example," the doctor said. I am from a rich but uneducated family. My father was a big landlord and we lived in a remote village. I was the only child of my parents. They loved me so much and gave me everything which I could think of. However, I was

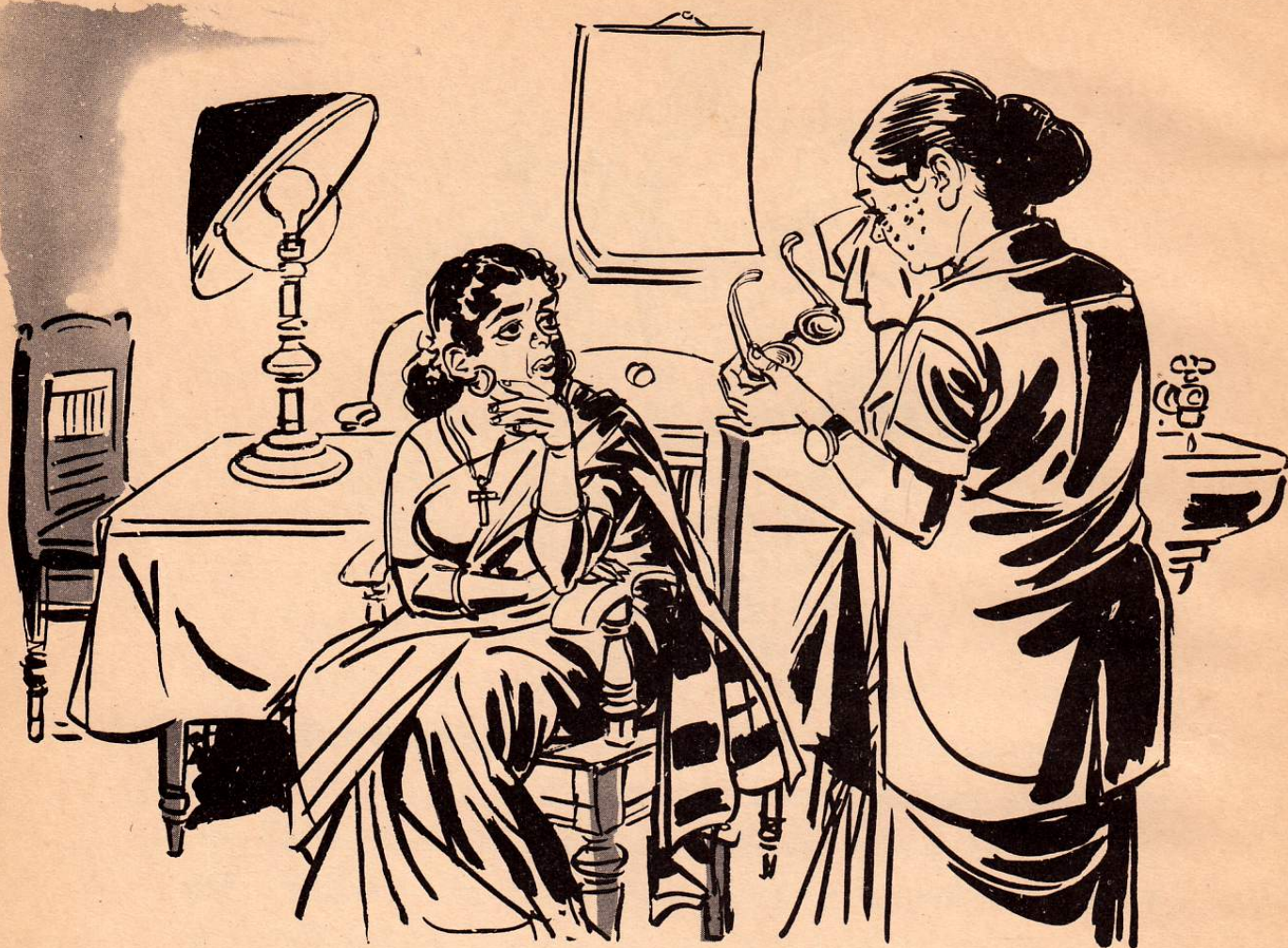




never vaccinated. My father was rather ignorant and he did not realise the importance of vaccination.

“When I was seven, I had an attack of small-pox. Father consulted a village physician. He was a quack. His advice was that since the disease was due to the ‘heat’ of the body, no ‘English medicines’ should be given to me. He gave me some stupid treatment which did not work. I was lucky to recover in course of time. But my face was badly spoiled.”

“You know, why I could not marry?” the doctor smiled bravely. “Because no boy was ready to accept me when I grew up. From the beginning I was a good student. I continued my studies and my parents desperately searched for a bridegroom. I was very sad and dejected. More so, because my mother would not allow me to study beyond High School. At last my father realized that there was not



much that life could offer me. He was convinced that books would keep my mind diverted.

“I went to the nearby town and joined a college. Because of my ugly face, no classmate would befriend me. I concentrated on my studies and got first class at the Intermediate examination. I joined the medical college. There too I secured a good degree.

“You see,” the doctor continued, “that is why I am single. Now, please wait for a minute more,” saying this,

the doctor went to the wash-basin and washed away her heavy makeup. She dried her face and removed her thick spectacles. Mary saw to her horror that she had only one eye and her face was pitted with small-pox marks.

“What I want is that your girl should not. . .,” the doctor could not complete the sentence. Mary was now almost in tears. She got up and held the doctor’s hands. “Oh, now I understand, I have been a fool!” she exclaimed. “I must get my girl vaccinated.”

Broken Marriage

Venkatasubba Reddiar was the richest tobacco merchant of Travancore. His famous shop was in Chalani Bazar, not far from his palatial house. He was about fifty. He had a daughter, who was his only child. She was said to be very beautiful but she never went out of her house. Nor did she meet people who came to her house. So, no one had really seen her very well.

A young man, distantly related to Reddiar, assisted him in his business. He was twenty-four, his name was Natarajan. He had done only Intermediate when his father died. There was no one to support the family. Natarajan had to give up his studies and take a job in Reddiar's tobacco shop. He was well-behaved, worked hard and honestly and thus earned the confidence of his employer. With all these qualities, he soon became the senior-most assistant to the big businessman.

Every night Natarajan used to close the shop at eight. He would then go to his employer's house and hand him over the money collected during the day.

Although Natarajan had been going to his employer's place for nearly a year, he had never met anyone of his family.

One of the servants would show him into the drawing room where he would meet Reddiar.

But after some time it so happened that occasionally he got glimpses of a young girl in the adjoining room. The room was not well-lighted but he could make out that she was fair and beautiful. He even felt that she was taking rather an unusual interest in him. Once, when Reddiar and Natarajan were in the drawing room, the girl came in. She was searching for a pen which she had misplaced. Reddiar introduced her as his daughter. She hardly lingered there for a minute. But her beauty was enough to dazzle Natarajan.

One day Reddiar's old, old mother came to Natarajan's house. She proposed to his mother that Natarajan should marry her beautiful grand-daughter, the only issue of the rich merchant. Natarajan could hardly believe his ears. It was all so unexpected.

Natarajan wanted to share his happiness with someone. He rushed to his doctor friend. His name was Danpal. His clinic was just nearby. Dr. Danpal was very happy when he was told about Natarajan's good luck. He congratulated him profusely.

After a fortnight Natarajan and Reddiar's daughter were duly married. Dr. Danpal along with many friends and relatives, was present at their marriage reception. He was in a very jolly mood. He told Natarajan half seriously, "Now that you have got such a charming wife, you won't come to me so frequently. I shall miss our hearty chats."



And really for two weeks he could see nothing of Natarajan. But one day he came to the doctor. Dr Danpal was shocked to find Natarajan looking sad and miserable.

"Any thing the matter?" he asked.

Natarajan slumped in a chair. He cried, "Doctor, she is a leper!"

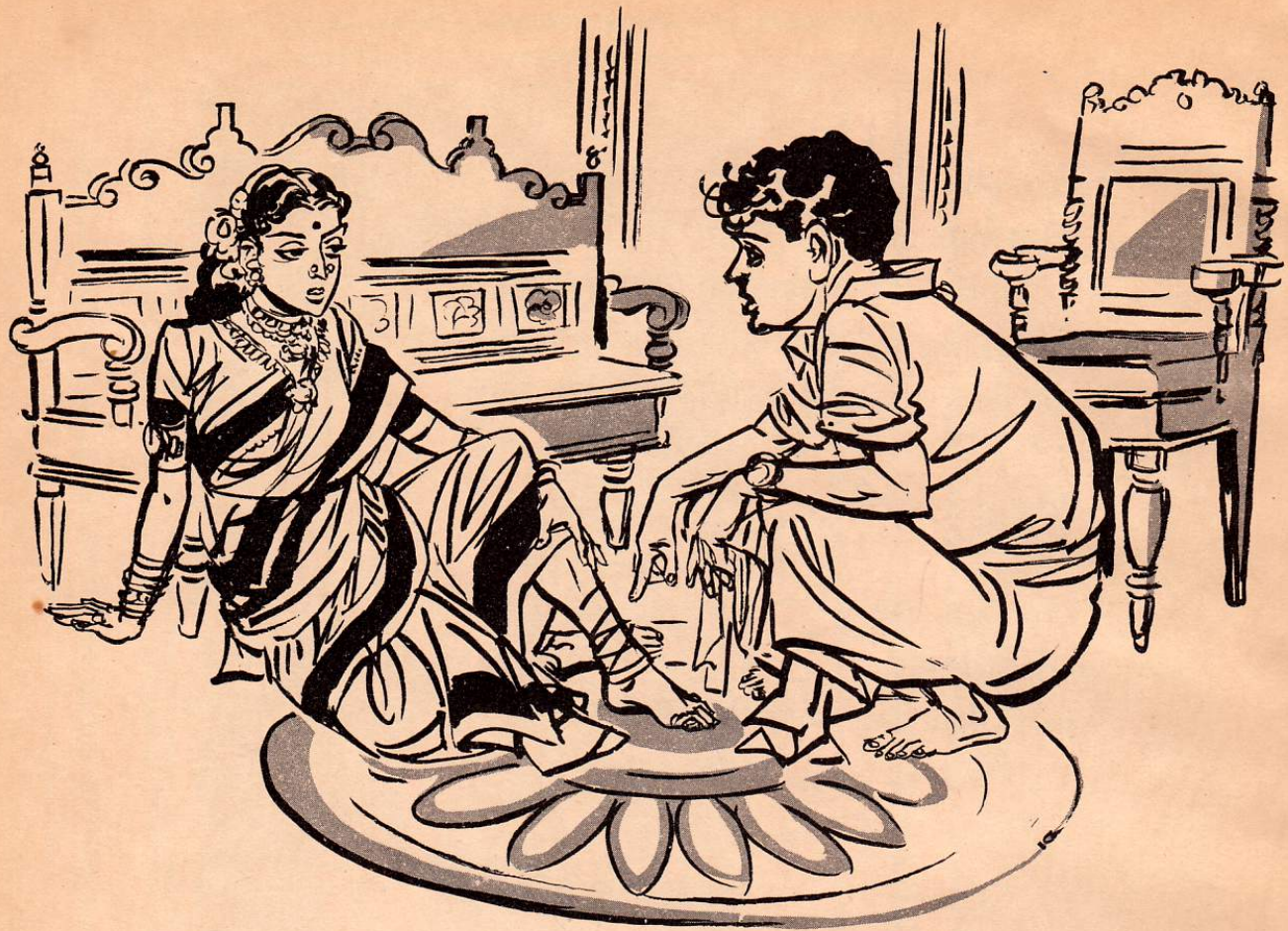
"What!"

"....."

"Are you sure? How do you know?" his friend managed to ask.

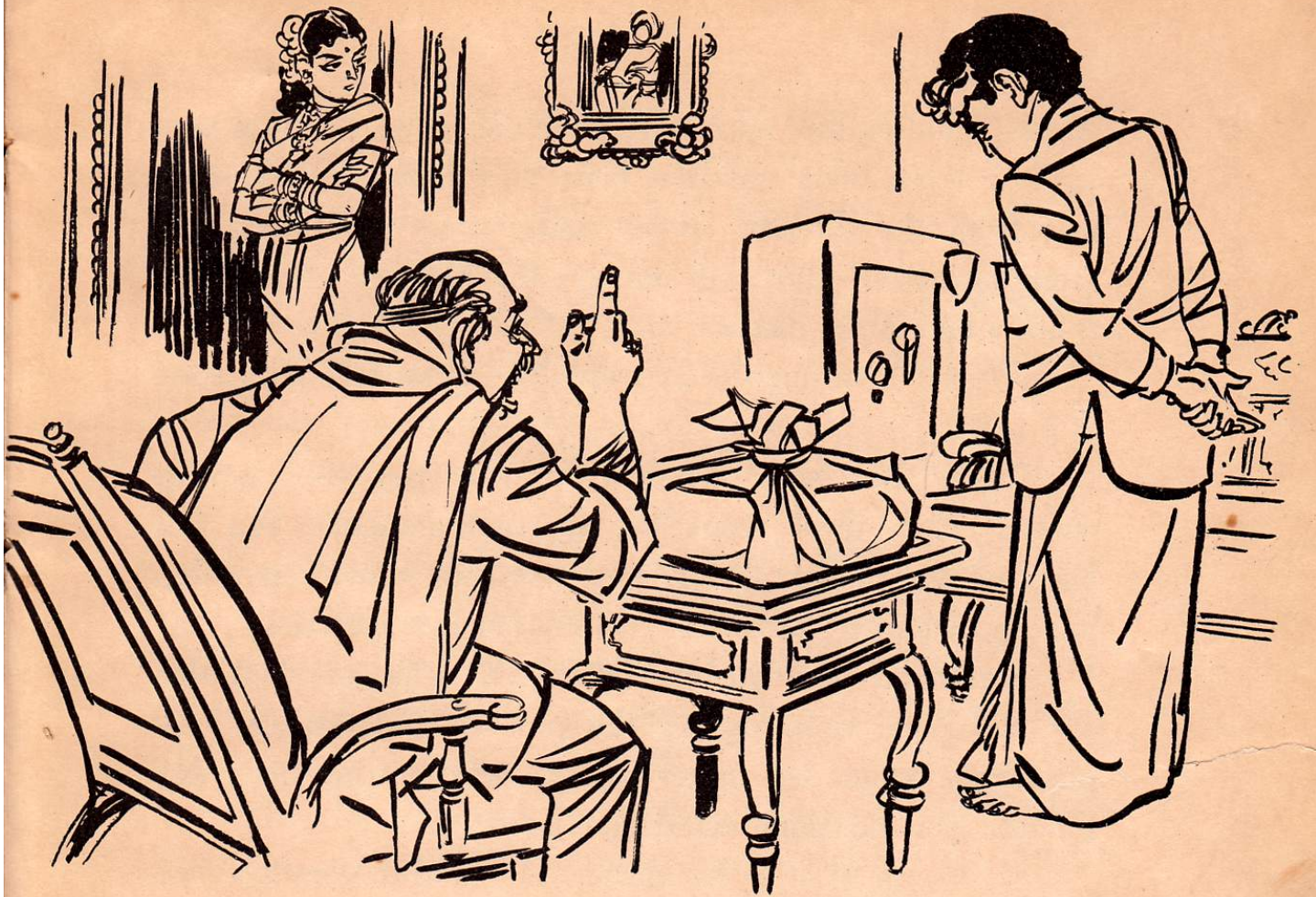
"Just after our marriage, I noticed a bandage on her





left foot," replied Natarajan. "She told me that she had an injury and that she was dressing it daily and it would be all right. I wanted to dress it but she would not let me take the trouble. But when two weeks passed and she did not remove the bandage, I insisted on seeing it. Oh, friend! It was no small injury. It was a very, very sore wound that went deep into her foot. When I told her that we should at once come to you, she started sobbing aloud."

"Just then her father came to my house. He saw her unbandaged foot and realised what had happened. He took us to his house. There in a few words he informed me that his wife had been suffering from leprosy for the past few years, and that the daughter had also probably got the dis-



ease from her. He even had the nerve to tell me that I had become a family member and that I should keep it a secret. All of his money was to go to his daughter.

“Oh, doctor! Please help me. Suggest something. Do you think that by now I would also have got the disease from my wife?” he asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” the doctor replied. “It requires prolonged and intimate contact for the disease to spread from one person to another. Although husband and wife can get it from one another, in your case the contact has been only for about a fortnight. I am sure you are safe. Of

course, children and adolescents can catch the infection very easily. Even then, children born to a leprous mother are free from the disease. If the children are separated soon after their birth, they will not get the disease. You see, it is not a hereditary disease."

"But if I continue to live with her, I can get the disease. Is it not so?"

"Yes. But with proper treatment your wife can be cured. Then there won't be any such danger. You just find out two things: How long has your wife been suffering, and whether the doctor treating her is a specialist."

Natarajan came to his house. His wife told him that she had been suffering for the past six months. A local physician, whom her father trusted, was treating her. She thought that he alone could cure her.

Natarajan went to her father. He tried to convince him that they should consult a specialist. But the father was simply furious. He warned Natarajan not to say a word to anyone else about this.

Natarajan was full of anguish. He went to his friend's clinic and told him everything. "I don't see any hope. There are only two ways out. Either I must run away, or commit suicide," he said in disgust.

"I think it is because of a false notion that he is not consulting specialists. Of course, centuries ago people believed that one suffers from leprosy because of one's sins. Lepers were treated as outcasts. But now it should be clear to everybody that to get this disease is not a shameful thing.

It is just like any other disease. And it can be cured, to be sure. But the treatment should begin at a very early stage of the disease. It is foolish to hide the fact that one is suffering from leprosy.

"It is true that lepers are to be kept away from others. But it is not because they are sinners. It is simply because others can get the disease from the lepers. Just as a T. B. patient would spread his disease if he is not isolated."

Dr Danpal paused for a while. Then he said, "Had your mother-in-law been isolated, your wife wouldn't have got the infection. But were she to be isolated, everybody would have come to know that she was suffering from leprosy. The ignorance of your father-in-law, his false pride did not allow him to consult a specialist."

Then Dr Danpal asked Natarajan to go and see his wife and father-in-law and try to explain the facts. He thought that if their false pride is removed, they would be willing to see a specialist.

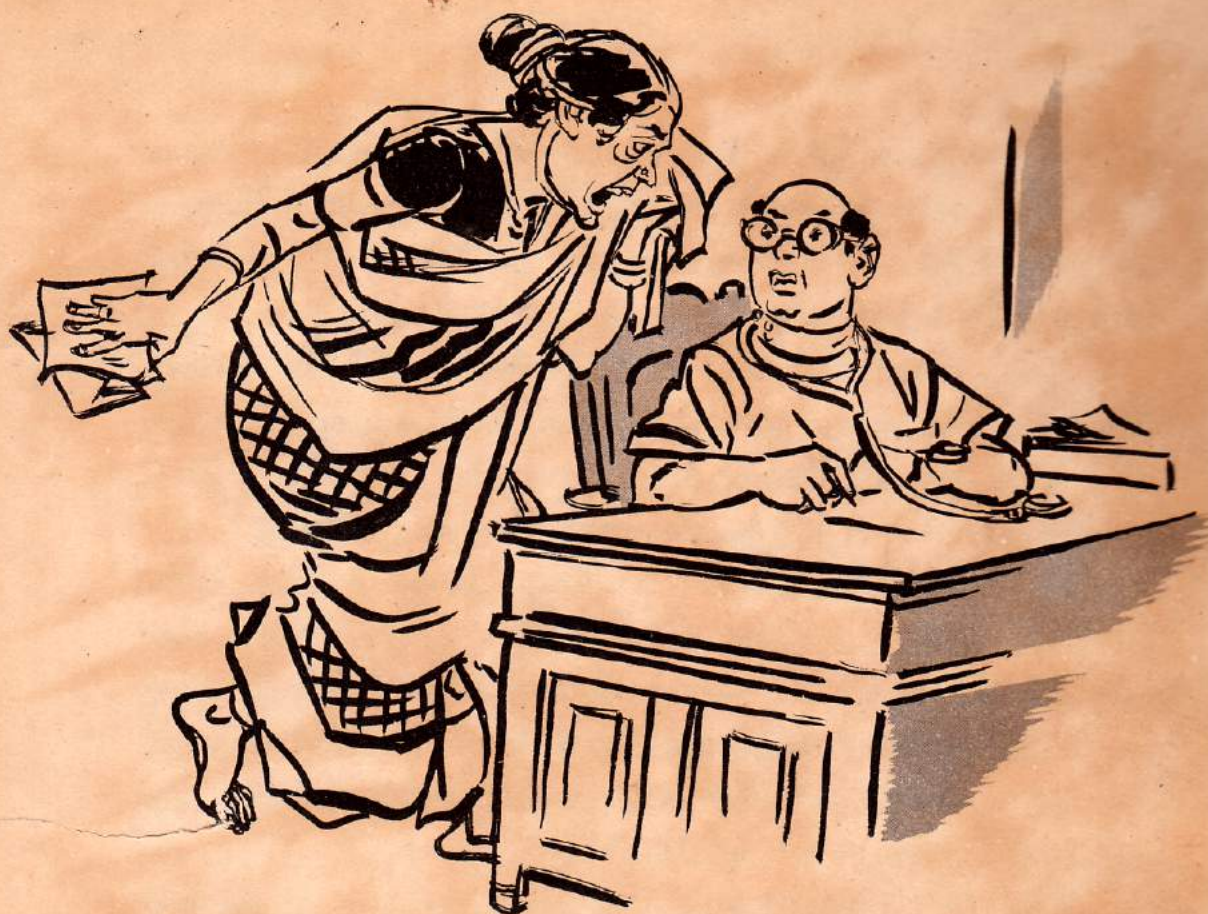
Natarajan thanked him and went away.

It was about ten days later. One night when the doctor was about to close his clinic that Natarajan's mother came to him. She was in acute distress. "Doctor," she said "Natarajan has run away, leaving me alone!"

"Run away?" How? the doctor was stunned.

"He did not come home last night," she sobbed. "And this evening I got a letter from him. It says that he was leaving for Calcutta. From there he would go to Malaya."

"How unfortunate! Is that all he has written?"



“He says that as soon as he gets some job, he would call me there. Meanwhile he wants me to leave this place and go to our village. . . . He has asked me to inform you also.”

“So you are leaving for the village?”

“What else can I do?”

“Well, you go there. If he writes to me and gives his address, I will try to convince him that he should return to India and find some job here.”

“It is very kind of you.”

“How tragic! It would not have happened had Reddiar thought better of his false pride and consulted a specialist in time. His ignorance has ruined his only daughter.”

